

25c

No. 1

ENCLOSURE

AN
ORIGINAL

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PICTO-FICTION
MAGAZINE

Adult Tales of

TERROR

Horror and Suspense

ILLUSTRATED



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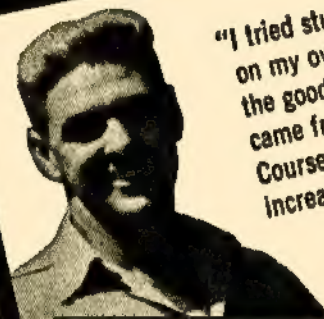
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TERROR

No. 1

ILLUSTRATED

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"Adult Tales of TERROR Illustrated" is the third in a new series of magazines to present a novel and revolutionary development in the art of story-telling. We at E.C. call this new form of adult entertainment "Picto-Fiction." Picto-Fiction is a careful combination of two arts: the art of writing, and the art of illustration.

We deliberately label Picto-Fiction "adult" entertainment because it is designed to be just that . . . entertainment for the more mature fiction reader.

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Future issues will include a "Readers' Page" made up of your comments, so we invite mail. The address is:

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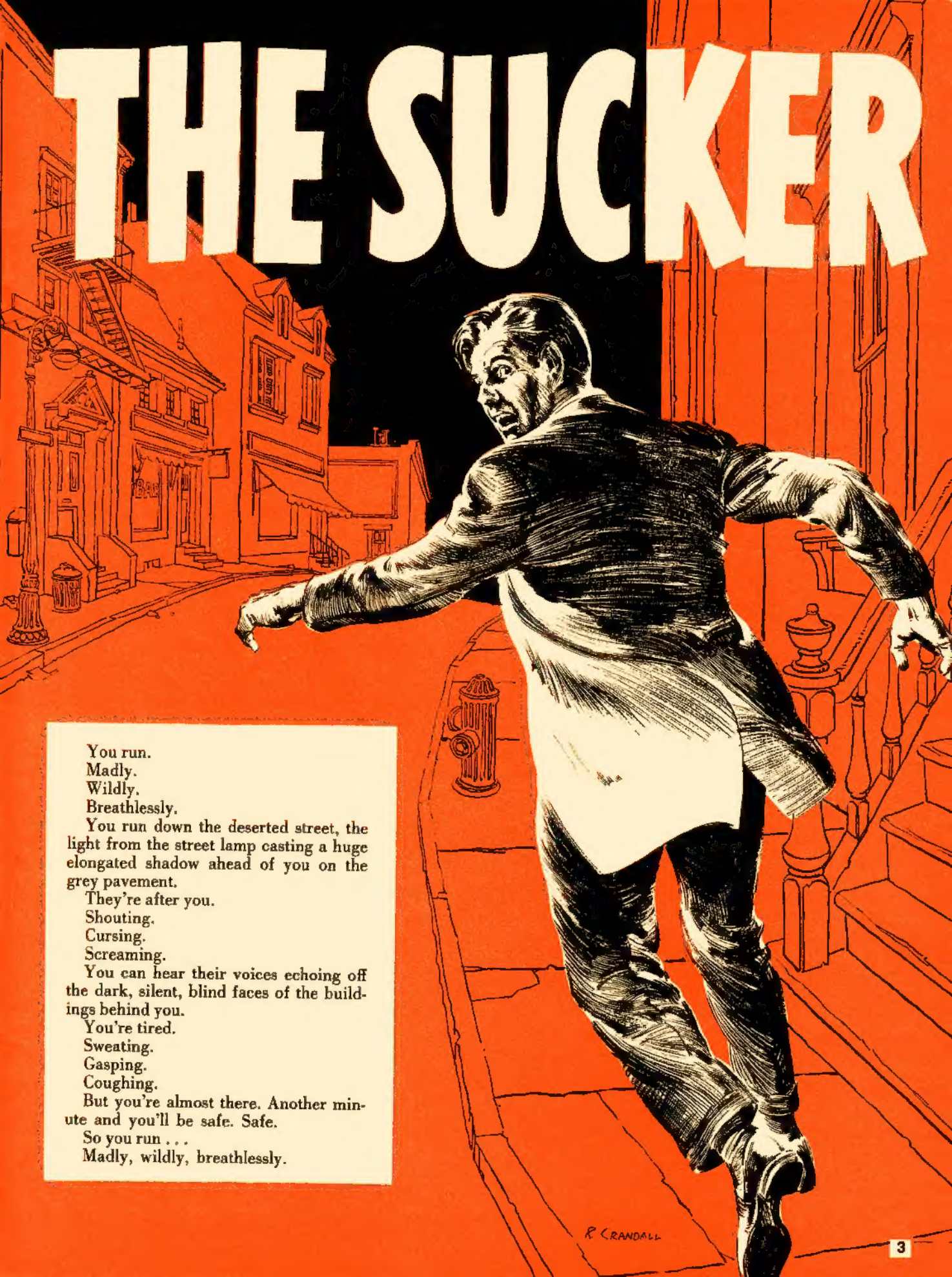
BUSINESS MGR.

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SUBSCRIPTIONS

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THE SUCKER



You run.

Madly.

Wildly.

Breathlessly.

You run down the deserted street, the light from the street lamp casting a huge elongated shadow ahead of you on the grey pavement.

They're after you.

Shouting.

Cursing.

Screaming.

You can hear their voices echoing off the dark, silent, blind faces of the buildings behind you.

You're tired.

Sweating.

Gasping.

Coughing.

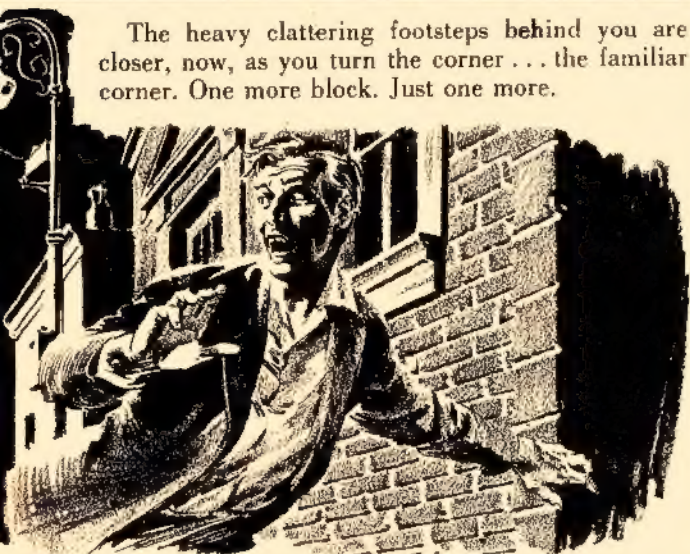
But you're almost there. Another minute and you'll be safe. Safe.

So you run . . .

Madly, wildly, breathlessly.

R. CRANDALL

The heavy clattering footsteps behind you are closer, now, as you turn the corner . . . the familiar corner. One more block. Just one more.



And then you're there, hurling yourself down the stone steps . . . the steps you've come down so many times before . . . the steps to your basement home.



It is dark. You lie quietly, scarcely breathing. You listen to their clumsy feet clattering by in the street above . . . their angry shouting.



Your fear subsides. You feel warm now. Safe. You're home. Back where you belong. They can't harm you here. You listen to their voices drifting off into the night.

"He's turned in somewhere!"

"We'll find him! We'll get him!"

"The fiend!"

You relax. You stretch out comfortably and sigh. A million thoughts race through your mind. A million thoughts race back . . . back to the beginning.

You'd gotten off the train from Chicago with money in your pocket. A lot of money. Blood money. Money you'd stolen. Money you'd killed for.

You'd run then too. From the little store you'd held up. From the stupid proprietor who'd tried to stop you until you'd pumped three bullets into his twitching body. You'd run then too.

You'd run back to your cheap hotel room, packed hastily, and caught a train. Into the night. Into obscurity. Until you'd come to this quiet city, far from your crime. And you'd gotten off the train.



You'd met her then. You'd stood on the deserted station platform, watching the train pull away, and she'd been there, smiling at you.

She'd stood beneath the light of the lamp, and her eyes had flashed with a strange, mysterious fire. You'd moved toward her, as if drawn by some invisible thread. "Excuse me," you'd said. "I'm a stranger in town. I just got in. I was wondering..."

"I know," she'd smiled. "I saw you get off the train. You'll be looking for a place to stay."



She'd been beautiful. Yes, you remember that. She'd looked into your eyes and your heart had pounded in your chest. Her lips had been full and red. Inviting. When she'd spoken, they'd touched, clinging for a moment, as if reluctant to part once more. You'd suddenly longed to taste those lips.

"Well, as a matter of fact, I do need a room!" you'd said, your imagination running wild.



She'd taken you by the hand, her jet black hair shimmering as the night breeze gently caressed it. "Come with me," she'd whispered.

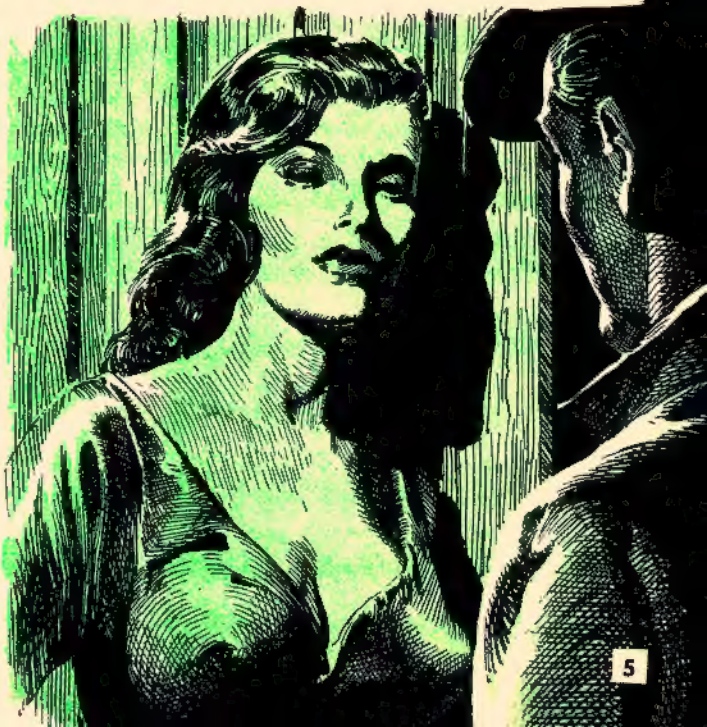
You couldn't resist her. Just the sight of her had kindled a fire within you. You'd gone with her, and she'd led you through the night streets to the alley and the stone steps.

"You can stay here," she'd smiled.



You lie there, with a million thoughts racing through your mind. You lie there, remembering. But you can't seem to remember clearly. The memory is hazy now. You'd objected as she'd unlocked the door. You know that. "But, I can't move in on you," you'd said, not wanting to impose.

"I'll be leaving tomorrow night. This will be your place after I'm gone." She'd stepped inside.



And then she'd closed the door and pressed close to you . . . her full red lips so near . . . so near . . .



You remember that. You remember her coming close to you . . . her soft mouth quivering. But the memory fades out there. The rest is blank. There are so many places afterwards that are blank. The pauses . . . the dark, empty places in your line of thought begin there . . . with her coming close to you.

What happened? What came after? You cannot remember. The rest of that night and the whole next day are lost to you, like some forgotten melody.

The next thing you can recall is the following night. You'd been asleep. You can remember awakening . . . opening your eyes . . . and seeing her there, in the shadows, her eyes shining with that strange fire.

And you can remember how weak you'd felt. How you'd tried to rise. How she'd come to you, out of the shadows, and whispered:

"I stayed. I stayed an extra day. For you. I could not leave. Not yet . . ."

And you remember how she'd bent close to you, again, like that first night, her full red lips so near. And how she'd touched your eyelids gently closed, saying softly, "Sleep! Sleep, my dearest!"



"Tomorrow, you will feel strong. Tomorrow you will be ready. As for now . . . sleep . . . sleep . . ."

And you'd felt her warm breath upon your neck and the touch of those soft red lips.



Here again, there is another blank spot. Here again, the memory fades into darkness. You'd slept again . . . a dead, dreamless sleep. And when you'd awakened, it was night once more. Another day had come and gone. And with it, the girl.



You'd struggled to your feet, looked around the dank, dismal place she'd taken you to, and stumbled outside to the stone steps and up to the street.



Two whole days! For two whole days, you'd slept! What had she done to you? What was that strange weariness you'd felt? That hunger? That craving? You'd had to find her. So you'd begun to search.



You'd searched everywhere. In bars, back rooms, nightclubs, juke-box joints. You'd combed the city. "Naah, I ain't seen any broad fittin' *that* description, but I'd sure like to!" they'd said.



You'd thanked them and gone on. On. And a hatred had grown within you. As the night dragged by, it had infected, festered. She'd drugged you! Robbed you! Suddenly, you hated her. Hated her! And then you'd seen her, moving up the deserted street.



You'd run to her, hot with the rage you felt. And that other feeling was strong within you, too. That craving... that hunger for something...



She'd turned to you as you'd approached. And a look of fear had blanched her face. Then... then...

You try to remember. You lie in the darkness and try to remember what happened next. What you did to her. Only, you can't remember. Here, there is another blank spot. They become more frequent, now. Gaps in your memory chain. Voids in the past recalled. Empty places.

Had she screamed? You seem to recall an echoing shriek. Or had it been your own shriek of anger?

She'd fallen to the pavement. You know that. Because the next thing you remember is standing over her, looking down at her still, white face.

Only, somehow, her face had changed. She was no longer the girl you were searching for. And the hunger was gone too. The craving had disappeared.

You'd looked down at this stranger, and you'd felt sick and ashamed. You'd killed the wrong girl.



You'd run then, terrified. You'd run until you could run no more. You were tired, and gasping for breath when you saw them. The stone steps. Leading down to the place where you'd slept the day before.



You remember the sky getting light with the coming of the dawn. You remember the weariness that engulfed you. You remember stumbling down those inviting stone steps . . .



And then there is another blank spot . . . another gap in your memory.

Perhaps you slept again. Perhaps not. You cannot recall. The darkness fades, and the next thing you remember is the flashing lights of the theatre marquee. It was night again and you'd been walking the streets. The rage had been strong. And the hunger had returned. You'd thought:

"Perhaps a movie will help me take my mind off her. I haven't seen a movie in a long time."

So you'd crossed to the box office and stood in line and reached into your pocket.

You'd forgotten! She'd taken your money. You didn't have a cent! That girl . . .

You'd stood there, frustrated and angry, until they'd made you step out of line. And then, you'd seen her! That girl! Yes! She was coming out of the movie! *She'd* seen the picture! With *your* money!



You'd trailed her. The rage within you was a roaring storm. And the craving . . . the hunger . . .

When she finally turned into a quiet, deserted street, you'd overtaken her, grabbed her arm, and . . .



Another blank space. Another piece missing from the puzzle of your past. You lie there, listening, trying to remember. And you remember nothing except standing over her, and seeing her chalk-white face.



You remember standing over her. Not angry any more. Not craving any more. Just tired. Tired. And seeing that face. That chalk-white stranger's face. And crying out in dismay:

"Oh, God! I've made another mistake! This isn't her! This isn't the girl I'm looking for!"

Yes, you can remember that. You can remember, as you lie there safe in the darkness, how you'd knelt, and realized that she was dead, and become panicky as a car turned into the street, casting its headlight glare on the still form lying in the gutter. Yes, you can remember how you'd fled into a black alley. How you'd run. And how you'd thought as you'd run through the night:

"I'm a murderer! She's done something to me! She's driven me out of my mind! She's made me a murderer! She's done this thing to me! That girl! But, I'll find her! I'll find her!"



You'd run. Until there was no more strength in your legs. Until your heart pounded and your brain throbbed. Until the coming dawn streaked the night sky. Until you were there . . . at the steps once more.



Another void. Another span of darkness. It was night once more when you climbed to the street and heard the newsboy's cry:

"Extra! Extra! Read all about the murders!"



You remember how you'd gone to him, and stuttered an excuse about forgetting your wallet . . . promising to pay him back. And how the boy had looked at you with contempt and handed you a paper.

"TWO WOMEN FOUND MURDERED," the headlines had screamed. "Two unexplained deaths on two successive nights have the police of this city baffled and the populace terrorized," the article had gone on. "The causes of death have, as yet, been undetermined, but it is believed that a dangerous maniac is stalking the street. Citizens are warned to stay indoors and avoid walking the streets at night. A twenty-four hour police . . ."

You'd crumpled the paper into a ball and flung it from you, cursing.



And once again, you'd stalked the city, looking for her . . . your anger, your hunger, your craving stronger than ever. And then, you'd seen her. Only this time, you'd made sure. You'd crept up behind her and clapped your hand over her mouth and looked into her wide screaming eyes. You'd looked carefully as your brain reeled. This time it *was* her! This time there was no mistake! Yes. Yes . . .



Another blank. Another lapse. You remember only that the storm had broken, that the rage had run wild, and that the craving had subsided. When it was over, when she lay on the grass with her pale face turned up to you and you'd wiped your moist lips and looked down at her, you'd seen to your horror that once again you'd erred. Once again you'd made an awful mistake. Once again, you'd killed the wrong woman!



You lie in the darkness and remember. That was last night. That was when you realized that they *all* looked like her to you *before*. But *after* . . .

And tonight. You remember tonight. You remember stumbling once again up the stone steps and going in search of her through the night streets. And coming to the crowd gathered in front of the radio store, listening to the latest bulletins rasping from the round, expressionless face of the speaker over the doorway:



" . . . last night the killer's third victim was found in an empty lot in the same general area where the previous two bodies were discovered. An autopsy revealed that she, too, had met her death in the same manner as the two young women before her. The theory has been advanced that this is the work of . . ."

You'd looked around as the voice from the loud-speaker rambled on about the murderer. You'd studied the faces. The morbidly fascinated faces.

And then you'd seen her.



You'd hidden behind a fat man and waited. This time it *was* her. It was!

"... Doctor Alex Farnsworth has declared that there is no foundation to this theory, however. That such creatures belong in the realm of superstition and fantasy and do not exist..." the voice from the loudspeaker had droned on.

She'd listened intently to the gory details, and you'd waited. Finally, she'd turned, pushed gently through the crowd, and walked away. You'd followed.



She'd walked quickly, frightened by what she'd heard on the radio. You'd crept along behind her, hugging the shadows. You'd suddenly felt a faint suspicion that after it would be over... after the rage had subsided and the strange craving had been satisfied... that she'd be someone else! That she wouldn't be that girl at all!

Yet you'd followed her. You'd had to!

And when she'd turned into that empty street, you'd closed in. But you were clumsy. You'd made noise. She'd spun around, saw you, and screamed.



They'd heard her screams. They'd come running. The crowd from the radio store. You'd had to escape. And so you'd run, madly, wildly, breathlessly.

You'd run back to your stone steps... to your resting place.

Now, you lie in the dark and there is no more remembering. Except for what the voice over the loudspeaker had blared... about the victim's blood being drained from their bodies!

"The work of a vampire," it had said.



You sit up, suddenly. You gaze around your dank dismal resting place. The place she'd taken you to. A vampire? Is that what you are?

The light of dawn is just beginning to grope through the window above you. It fills the room with an eerie greyness. You look down at the oblong box you've been lying in. The coffin.



It's true, then! You *are* a vampire! She made you one! That girl! She took you here and made you a member of the living dead, like her. She made you a thing that sleeps by day in a coffin, and stalks its victims by night, driven by an insatiable craving for blood. Warm human blood.

You try to rise. There are heavy footfalls on the stone steps outside.

"What about this place? We didn't search here!"

"The door's locked!"

"Knock it down!"



You try to rise as the door splinters, smashes open, and they burst in. But you cannot rise. The craving for blood went unsatisfied tonight. You are weak. You lie back in your coffin, cringing, as they rush at you, their outraged eyes shining in the torchlight. You lie back weakly, and see the one in front stare down at you, raise the huge wooden mallet in his hand, and snarl:

"Somebody . . . gi'me the stake!"



You watch, horrified, as the one in front leans over you. You watch, too weak to push the stake aside, as he places its crudely whittled point to your chest. You watch as he raises the mallet high. And as he brings it down, you scream. Again and again, as the mallet falls, you scream.



You'll remember the end . . . the tearing of flesh, the crunching of bone, the excruciating pain as the stake digs into your throbbing heart. You'll remember it all. And lastly, you'll remember her. There. In the crowd. Smiling down at you. Then laughing. Laughing! And her laughter will follow you into eternity.



THE END

SURE-FIRE SCHEME



Tim Haley lay on the bunk of his cage-like cell in the prison's Death-Row. There was no responsive thud in the doctor's ears when he placed his stethoscope to Haley's chest. His heart had stopped. For a moment, it seemed that everything had stopped. Every sound, every motion seemed to hesitate. Death Row was always silent, but now even that silence seemed intensified.

When the doctor spoke, his voice was sudden, startling.

"This man is dead," he said quietly.

"So . . . he kept his word." The warden shook his head in wonderment. "He said we'd never execute him. Thanks, Doc."

"No trouble, Warden. I'd have had to check him over after the execution in any case." The doctor, too, shook his head wonderingly.

"Strange," he went on. "Less than an hour left before he was due to walk to the electric chair, and he dies . . . like this. His heart simply quit beating. I . . . I wonder if, somehow, he *knew* that this would happen."

But only Haley could have answered that. And he was dead.

Or . . . so he seemed to be.

His body lay limp on the cot, without breath, without pulse.

And yet, somewhere deep within the recesses of Haley's brain, there was a writhing...a twisting...a remembering...



Haley was angry. The carnival had buttoned up for the night hours ago. Along the deserted midway, only an occasional bit of paper skidded before the wet wind, past the darkened tents. It was almost two in the morning and Rosa had not come. And now, the night was turning raw, the dampness was sweeping through the loud cheap suit which was the badge of Haley's profession. Haley was a barker, with all of a barker's brashness and self-assurance. But here, without an audience, he seemed just what he really was: a small man with a hairline moustache whose chief talent was an ability to exploit the inarticulate yearnings of certain type women . . . like Rosa.

She came hurrying down the midway now, staying in the shadows, to where he waited. A young woman, inclined to plumpness, with a pink farmgirl complexion. She'd been a farmgirl, once . . . until the carny had passed through her home town and its false glitter had pulled her along in its wake.



Now, Rosa was Hank Price's wife. Hank owned the carny's food concession. He was past fifty. But he had money in the bank, a prosperous concession, and Rosa.

Rosa came into Haley's arms without preamble. She huddled there, her face on his shoulder.

"Oh, Tim, Tim, I was so afraid you'd be gone when I got here. I thought Hank would never fall asleep. You're . . . you're not angry with me?"

"With you?" Haley said it warmly, trying to hide the fact that he was sick to death of her. He smiled, held her tighter. "Baby doll, you know better than that. I'm crazy about you, you could never do anything to make me sore."

He thought about his plan.



How would she take it? Haley wondered. His plan was foolproof. He was certain of that. But he'd need Rosa's help. Well . . . there was just one way to find out.

"I'm not sore, sweetheart," he began. "But, Rosa, how long can we keep this up? It's driving me crazy! Meeting secretly. Stealing these moments. If only we could be together always. If only we could get married."

"Oh, Tim, if only we could. But Hank would never let me go. You know how he is." Rosa sighed.



"Yeah," Tim spat. "I know. He's mean and rich. He's got everything and I've got nothing." He turned away. "But it doesn't have to be like that!"

"It doesn't?" Rosa's voice was like that of an innocent child. When Haley turned back, his eyes were like marbles. But Rosa did not notice.

"No. It doesn't. If Hank were . . . dead, we'd be all set, wouldn't we? We'd have his money . . . his concession . . . and you'd have me. All legal!"



He had expected Rosa to recoil. And he was ready for it. When she drew away, he held her, he whispered to her. And gradually, the horror in her face lessened. In the end, he laughed it off . . . said that he had not meant it. But the seed had been planted. He told her no more, nothing about his plans.

Now, there was the second step. In the morning, Haley went to see Krishna.



Midway down the carny's main avenue, there was a garish banner loudly proclaiming Krishna's talents: KRISHNA, THE ONE, THE ONLY MYSTIC OF THE EAST! SEE HIM BURIED ALIVE! Krishna did a suspended animation act, and Haley had been cultivating him for weeks.

"So you really meant it when you said you'd show up today." The Hindu was a true Indian, from Nepal, but twenty years of carnys had given him the accent of the roustabout.



"You really want to learn my suspended animation act, eh?" he smiled.

"I said I did." Haley made his voice earnest. "Krishna, you know how I feel. What am I? A Barker. A nothing. If I had an act of my own, I'd be somebody. You promised."



"Sure, I promised. I said I'd teach you." The Hindu shrugged. "But that was over a bottle. Haley, look. Why pick my kind of act? You'd have to work hard, learn to control your breathing, your muscles. It's rough! And maybe after a year you still won't be able to do it!"



"I'll be able to do it," said Haley. "I've got a reason."

"Okay." The Hindu was not enthusiastic, but he'd lived a long time with carny people. He could recognize a driving ambition when he saw it. "We'll start now."



The beginning was slow. Breathing exercises. But it was a start. Almost, Haley was happy. He did not speak to Rosa again about his plan. Only, sometime, when he saw her walking along the midway with Hank, he could smile inside, picturing Hank's money in his pocket . . . Hank's concession in his name. Of course, he'd have to marry Rosa, but it would be worth it.



It took a year. A year of hard work, of learning to concentrate until his brain ached. But Haley did it.

There was a time, at last, when his body lay on the cot in Krishna's tent and it seemed to him that he hovered above it, staring down at its pale stillness. There was a time when his brain was a pinpoint of energy, whirling in space, growing ever smaller . . . smaller . . . until it seemed to go out altogether . . . until there was nothing . . . nothing at all . . .



"Haley! Haley, wake up!"

Krishna's face hung over him, lean and saturnine in the gloom.

"You did it! You slowed your heart until it was inaudible . . . slowed your breathing until you were scarcely breathing at all. You did it! You reached a state of suspended animation!"



"All you have to do now is learn to control the length of time you stay in the trance. I didn't think it could be done, but you've learned in a year what it took me five years to learn. You sure must want that act of your own real bad."

Krishna's words were a marvel of understatement. "Yeah. Yeah, I do. I got ambition," Haley smiled.



He told Rosa that night. About his success. And she clung to him.

"At last! Tim, I'm so happy. Now, you'll be able to have your own act! I'll be able to leave Hank . . ."

"Not so fast." Rosa leaving Hank was not part of Haley's plans. "You'll stay with Hank! I'll get rid of him! In my own time and in my own way!"

"Get . . . rid of him?" Rosa's face paled.

"You heard me," Haley wasn't going to pull any punches now. He was ready. "Hank's going to die! Soon! And when he does, then you and I are getting married! But, not before! Hank's got money, insurance, a good business! I've got it all worked out!"

"No!" Rosa guessed, in that moment. She knew exactly what Hank was saying. "No, Tim! You're talking murder! I won't listen! You can't . . ."

"I can and I will . . . and you're going to help me! You just shut up and listen . . ."



"No! No, I won't listen! I won't . . ."

Haley slapped her. Hard.

"You'll listen. You'll do just as I say. Or maybe you'd like that husband of yours to get an earful about us? About what's been going on behind his back! You wouldn't like that, would you?"



No, Rosa wouldn't like that. So Rosa listened. And Haley's plan was so simple, so foolproof. Hank would die. Haley would see to that. Then, he would have two chances to get away with it. One: he might not even be suspected. And, two: That was where Rosa came in.

"You little sap," he sneered at her. "Did you think I spent a year learning that suspended animation gimmick just to start my own crummy act? Learning Krishna's stuff was my ace in the hole. If the cops do tumble to me and I'm pinned for it, I've got a way out."

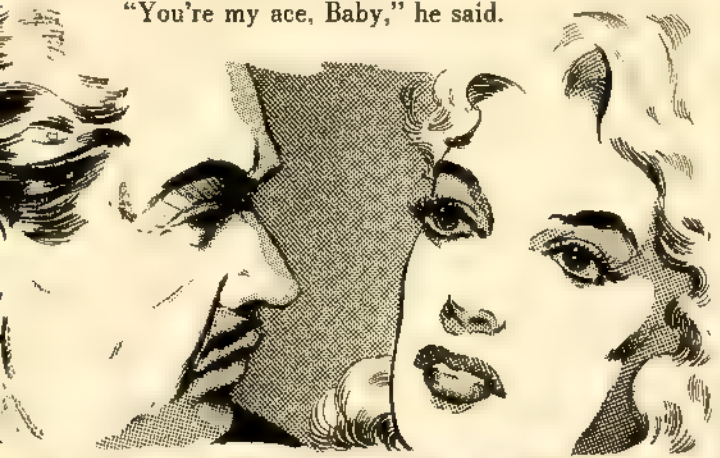
It was a beautiful idea. Haley was proud of it.

"Now, get this. If I'm convicted, you wait till I'm dead. Only, I won't be dead! Because, just before the execution, I go into my act. And no doctor on earth can tell suspended animation from the real McCoy. I get pronounced dead, and then, a day later, you claim my body. I come to . . . and that's it!"

"It can't miss," he added.

Rosa was breathing hard. Her pitiful little dream world had just fallen apart. Haley had demolished it. But he had no thought of that. He gripped her forearms tightly, hurting her.

"You're my ace, Baby," he said.



"Just remember. You do like I say. Otherwise, I tell Hank what's been going on. And if I go through with the setup and you don't show up at the jail to claim my body, just remember this: Thirty-six hours after I go into my act, I'll come to! And if you haven't shown, I'll swear you helped me kill Hank!"

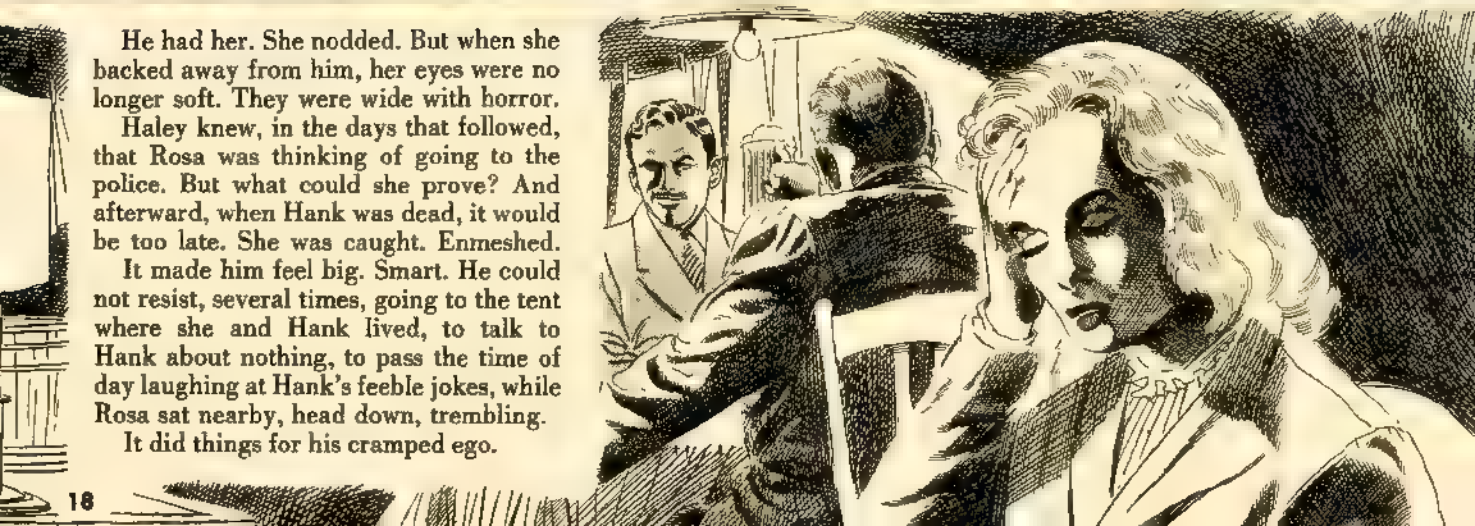


He had her. She nodded. But when she backed away from him, her eyes were no longer soft. They were wide with horror.

Haley knew, in the days that followed, that Rosa was thinking of going to the police. But what could she prove? And afterward, when Hank was dead, it would be too late. She was caught. Enmeshed.

It made him feel big. Smart. He could not resist, several times, going to the tent where she and Hank lived, to talk to Hank about nothing, to pass the time of day laughing at Hank's feeble jokes, while Rosa sat nearby, head down, trembling.

It did things for his cramped ego.



But eventually, Haley had to make his move. Eventually, he was ready. Krishna could teach him no more.

On a raw windy night in November, Haley walked alone down the deserted midway. Under his coat, he carried a short length of lead pipe he'd bought. No one saw him. He skulked in the shadows until he reached the tent where Hank and Rosa slept. He pulled back the flap quietly and slipped inside.



There were two cots inside. On one, Rosa slept, her head cradled in her arm. On the other, Hank lay snoring, face up, a stupid grin on his face.

Haley raised the pipe. He brought it down on the stupid grin, erasing it in a red smear.

Then, there was only the dull sucking thud as the lead pipe rose and fell, rose and fell. Two, three, four times. He lost count.



Haley dropped the pipe after he'd wiped it clean of prints, and walked out of the tent. He felt nothing. No regrets, no remorse, nothing. He walked back down the deserted midway to his own tent, undressed, and climbed into his cot. He slept well for the remainder of the night.

It was Rosa's voice which awakened him the next morning. Rosa, screaming insanely...



Afterward, Rosa was numb. When the police came, she told them nothing. Haley could smile at that. How could she? She didn't dare!

The police seemed dull, plodding. They held the carnival up for a week, then let it move on. The police were not nearly as clever as Haley.

But they came for him a month later.



One of them told Haley how they'd traced the murder weapon . . . back along the road the carnival had travelled, to the tiny junk yard in the tiny town where Haley had bought it. He'd made a mistake in judgment.

Haley cursed his own stupidity, but then resigned himself. When they took him away, he let his eyes fall meaningfully on Rosa.



The trial was short. The court could prove no motive, but the evidence of the murder weapon, once Haley had been positively identified as the purchaser, was overwhelming. That, plus his proximity to the scene of the crime, his lack of any explanation, brought the verdict of the jury back to the courtroom after only an hour of deliberation:

Guilty.



Once, during the long weeks before his execution, Haley wrote to Rosa. Just an innocent-seeming letter in which he swore that he had not killed her husband and begged her to come see him so that he might tell her so himself.

But Rosa did not come, and Haley came near to panic. Without Rosa, he could not succeed.

His second letter was far more clever.

This time, Rosa came. Because in this letter, Haley hinted cleverly at his plan. Because he threatened her shrewdly, in such a way that Rosa would understand but the prison censor would not.

Rosa sat opposite him, beyond the metal mesh, in the little room off the condemned row, and Haley tried to convince her that he had not killed her husband.

That was for the benefit of the listening guard. In the end, Haley managed to get across to Rosa the real reason why he had sent for her. It was simple. When the guard turned aside for a moment, Haley whispered, "We were very good friends once, Rosa. I hope we're *still* good friends! For *both* our sakes. We . . . are good friends still, aren't we?"



The words were just words, but the inference was plain to Rosa. She nodded. That was enough for Haley.

No, Rosa would not let him down. How could she? If she did, it would be so simple to drag her down with him.

Haley waited. Until the night of the execution. Then, quite calmly, he stretched out on his cot, under the glaring light of the naked electric bulb, and closed his eyes.



His breathing slowed, practically ceased. His heart and pulse faded until they were inaudible. For the next thirty-six hours, for all intents and purposes, he would be a corpse.

Haley's last thought was of Rosa. No, she would not fail him.

Then, the darkness descended.



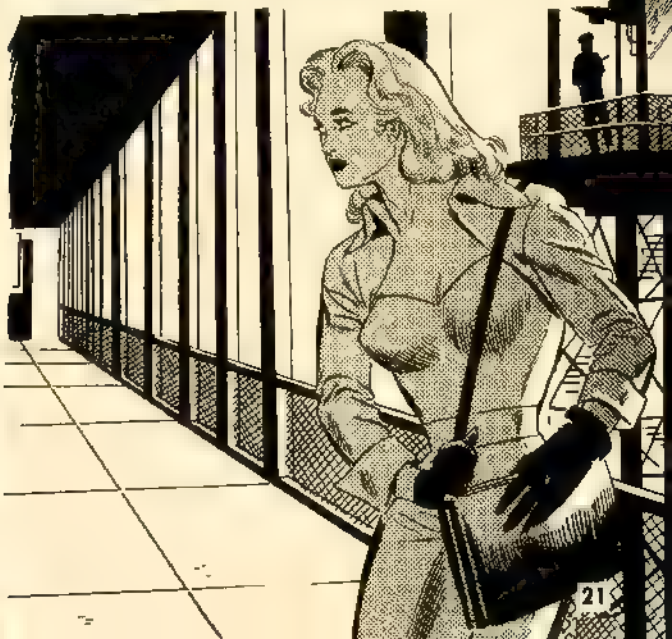
Nor did Rosa fail him.

She heard the news on the radio. She stood with her hands over her face, listening to the voice of the announcer, and her indecision was a palpable, throbbing thing. Her fingers were weak when she silenced the squawking box.



It was such a simple decision. Do as Haley asked, claim his body . . . or die with him. Haley would not hesitate to condemn her. Yet Rosa hesitated. Rosa was many things, but she was not a criminal, a murderess. She was a soft blob of helplessness, molded by the harsh feelings of circumstance.

She went to the prison, finally, twenty four hours after Haley's "death," as he'd instructed her. She stood outside the towering gates and waited.

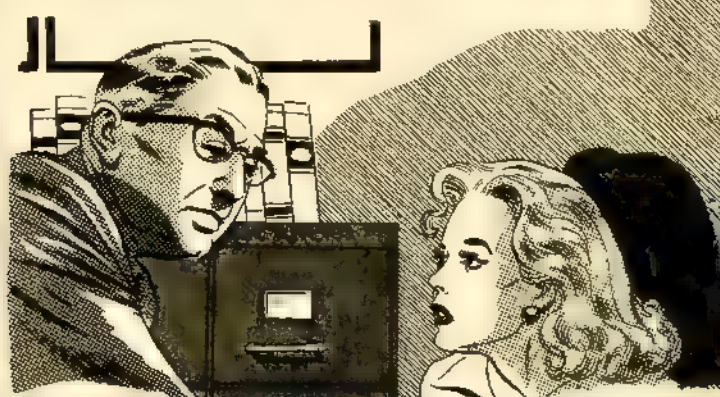


Finally, a guard came and led her into the concrete bowels of the prison to the warden's office.

He was a kindly man, the warden. He was all sympathy to Rosa's obvious nervousness. He soothed her.



"Mrs. Price," he said finally, "tell me something. You don't believe that Haley killed your husband, do you? I mean, when you called and asked permission to claim his body, I naturally assumed . . ."



"Warden, please. You said it was all right. You said I could claim the body for burial." Rosa was scared. Why the questions?

"And so you shall. Haley had no relatives, and the state denies no man his right to decent burial. Still . . ." The warden was curious.

That was the final indignity, the final horror. The lie that Rosa had to speak.

"No! No, I don't believe that Haley killed my husband! Would I . . . would I come here like this if I did?" She almost screamed it.

The warden asked no more questions. He was satisfied.

"Very well, Mrs. Price." He pressed a button on his desk. "You may have Tim Haley's remains. I'll send for them."

"You mean right this moment? But I thought . . . I arranged for a hearse!" Rosa glanced at the clock. "It won't be here for another ten minutes!"



"Hearse?" The warden looked at her.

A guard was coming in. He was carrying something. The warden took it, set it on his desk before Rosa.

And suddenly, Rosa was laughing. Not with her eyes or her lips or her voice, but deep inside. Laughing with a bitter laughter that bubbled and welled within the prison of her body. Laughing with a silent laughter that edged on madness.

"You won't require a hearse, Mrs. Price," the warden was saying. "In this State, the law requires that the body of any prisoner not claimed within twelve hours after death must be cremated!"

"Tim Haley's ashes are in this urn!"



THE END

REST IN PEACE



THURSDAY: I feel impelled to write. There is an air of decay about this place. I have just returned from the burial grounds. Paul took me there. We stood in the rain before the mausoleum, with the low rumble of thunder for counterpoint, and the harsh glare of lightning, blue-white on the old tombstones. And he told me why he had sent for me.

I arrived here this evening. Not two hours ago, I walked up the gravel drive to this old house, with its gables peering like rheumy eyes over the tops of the gnarled trees amid which it is set. There was no rain then. Only the wind, whipping the naked branches, and whining through the eaves.

A manservant, sere and old as the house itself, took my bags. And then Paul stood with me by the open door, not speaking, until I walked inside and saw for the first time the musty, massive furnishings and smelled for the first time the dank heaviness of the gloomy interior.

"I was afraid you would not come." Paul spoke, but his voice was thin.

Paul had changed since our days at the University together. He was pale, with the skin stretched tight across his forehead so that it seemed carven from alabaster.

"Your letter said that you needed help, Paul. What else are friends for?" I tried to smile, but in that place, my words hung hollowly. "You don't look well, Paul. Is that it? Are you ill?"



Paul looked at me. "Ill? Yes..." He led the way to a shadowy sitting room where a girl sat in pale silence in the gloom. "This is Cathy... my sister. Cathy, I want you to meet an old friend, Walter..."

She was... how can I write it? ... A whisp. A thing beautiful, yet without substance. A white, sickly thing behind whose eyes there lurked a certain something. A certain look of... fear.



I spoke of that fear to Paul. Later. After Cathy had smiled her wan smile and gone to her room. And the fear was there in Paul's eyes, too.

"Fear? Yes, we know fear, Walter. You asked if I was ill. We are both ill, Cathy and I! We are both afraid!"

"Afraid... of what?" I asked.

"Of death. And of what will come... after." And the fear in Paul's eyes flamed.

I did not understand. I told him so. I spoke of doctors. But Paul just shook his head. His words fell like stones in the silence.

"There is no cure for our illness, Walter!"

He told me, then. About his family. About how they died... or seemed to die. About how they faded, and breathed their last, and yet were not truly dead. About how they had been placed in their tombs... alive. Because no one had suspected. Not until it was too late. I had heard the tale before. But, before, Paul had not been afraid. Before, I had not met Cathy.

"You're not making sense, Paul," I said. "You've known about this illness in your family. Why should you start to fear it now? If you really think you're near death, surely your doctor would know."

"My doctor laughs at my fears. But fear grows, Walter. All these years, it's been growing inside me, like a cancer. Now... come with me."

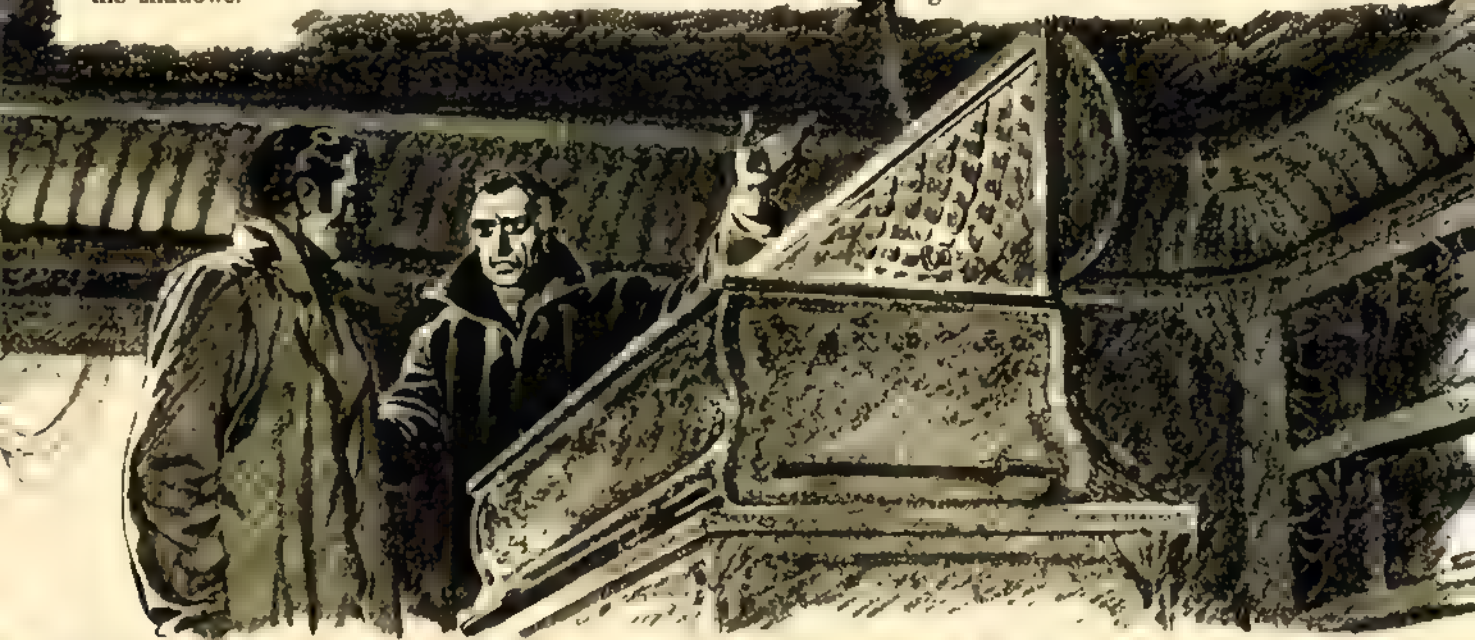
It was then that he took me to the burial grounds. We walked through the trees with the rain pelting us softly, and as we walked the wind grew stronger. And when we stood before the granite mausoleum, it shrieked like a tormented soul. I did not want to enter, but Paul pushed open the massive door and I followed. Into that place of death, where the corpses lay in their eternal night. And I saw the casket, bronze, resting upon a stone slab. It lay open, empty. From it, a chain led to the ceiling and across it. I could not see where it vanished into the shadows.

"The chain leads to the house, to my room. Beside my bed, there is a bell."

Paul spoke to me, and his eyes were burning coals, burning with the fear.

"Now you understand! If I die, I will be placed in this casket. And if I am not truly dead, if I revive, I will be able to signal! Before it is too late!"

His voice echoed hollowly in the cold gloom of the mausoleum.



I had to escape that place. I fled. But outside, Paul caught up to me. "Walter, promise! Promise that if I die, or seem to, you will stay in my room. For seven days. Promise!" His voice was pleading.

"But, Cathy... there's Cathy! If you should signal, she would hear!" I reasoned with him.

"No! Cathy is weak! She could not stand the shock! Walter, my time is near! Every instinct I have screams it! Promise me!" He clutched my arm.



What could I say? I have agreed. So, now, I sit in my bedroom, with the wind tapping skeleton fingers on my window and the candle flickering and throwing eerie, swaying shadows about me, and I write this account.

God only knows how it will all end. I want to run from this frightening place. But... I cannot! I know I must stay!



FRIDAY: Last night, I was troubled in my sleep. But the morning dawned bright and clear. And I have had a visitor. A Doctor Cooper. He came to see me early.



Doctor Cooper knows about the bronze coffin and the chain.

But the doctor believes that Paul is suffering from delusions. He believes that Paul's illness is of the mind.

He is more concerned with Cathy than he is with Paul. Cathy is the weaker of the two and she has succumbed to this house, to Paul's terror.

Doctor Cooper has asked me to try to make Paul relax. He frankly does not believe the stories about Paul's ancestors.

If I can make Paul forget his obsession, all may still be well.

All that is needed is for Paul to rest, to build his strength, so that he may face his delusions sanely.

I will do what I can.

SATURDAY: It is no use. Paul will not listen to me. I went to him, but he smiled and shook his head. He will not rest. All day, he paces in his room. I can hear him, through the wall . . .



SUNDAY: I have been with Cathy. I went to her an hour ago. She was in the gloomy sitting room, and I tried to make her understand. I gazed at that sickly loveliness and my heart broke for her. But she will not do as I ask. I can hear her words yet:

"Go away, Walter? No! Paul will never leave this house! Nor will I! We belong here. Here, we are close to the past. To the others. To those who have gone before."

I am being influenced by this awful place. I meant to speak calmly, sanely, but the words burst from my lips:

"The past! The past is dust! Can't you see what's happening to you? Paul's madness has infected you!"

"Madness?" Cathy smiled. "Paul and I are not mad, Walter. We know we cannot alter what must be. So we do not struggle. We wait!"

And then she looked at me, and there was a warm light behind the fear. A light of concern.

"Walter . . . listen to me . . ." she went on.



"Go! Go, now! Leave this house! Paul and I are not part of your world! Leave, before the horror that hangs over us takes you also!"



But, how can I leave now? How can I go, after the way Cathy looked at me. I must save her from this insanity. I must! I must stay!

MONDAY: Paul is avoiding me. He knows that I will try to make him rest, that I will attempt to make him see things sanely. But there is still Cathy. I went to her again tonight. There was a moon, and when I found her, she was in the garden, seated upon a stone bench, with the moonlight bathing her hair in pale brilliance. She seemed to glow, as some plants glow in the swamps where they grow, palely. I told her so, and that warm look came into her eyes again.

"You're a poet, Walter," she smiled. "But you must make poems about the living, not the dead!"

"Death! Always death!" I could not stop my flow of words. "Cathy, forget about death! Live!"



"You should have a sweetheart, Cathy," I said warmly, drawing near her. "Someone to love you."

"But . . . I have a sweetheart, Walter!" She looked at me, and I thought: Ah, how beautiful she is! "My sweetheart is here! Now!" I could not believe my ears. "He waits for me in the night and soon we shall be together. Soon, I shall feel the touch of his lips, like ice . . ."

Death! She spoke of death! How could I help it if I recoiled, if suddenly I saw her as a corpse. For she was! She lived, and yet she was not alive!

Have you ever held a corpse? I recoiled, and then I took her in my arms. With my lips, I tried to put back warmth in hers. And her lips were cold . . . cold . . .



Cathy is mad! As Paul is mad! There is no other explanation. They are willing themselves to die! They fear a living death, and yet they seek what they fear!

TUESDAY: Paul came to me today. He told me that Cathy was ill. Not ill as she was before. This is different. She lies, now, in her room, with her eyes closed, and she seems barely to breathe. I found her so when I ran to her.



She was dying. I could see that. But when I would have sent for Doctor Cooper, Paul would not let me. He stood before the door and spoke wildly. He said that this was as it was meant to be, and that I must not interfere.



It was then that I struck him. I had no choice. Cathy was dying and he would not let me call a doctor. I lashed out and knocked him to the floor.



Then I ran through the musty house, shouting for the manservant. But he was not there. And there is no telephone in this cursed place.



I went to the village myself. I ran all the way there and found the doctor, and brought him back. But his drugs were of no avail.



Cathy did not revive. She still lies out there as I write. My hand trembles.

What irony! What grim, fantastic irony! Paul lives, and Cathy is dying. My Cathy! My ...

Someone is at my door ...



LATER: It was the doctor. Cathy is dead. I cannot believe it.

Only moments ago, I stood beside her bed. And now she is dead.

I tried to comfort Paul, but he wants no comfort. Almost, I hate him! But of what use is hate? Cathy is dead!

Paul does not believe it. He sits by her side and stares into that beautiful, lifeless face. And when I speak to him, he shakes his head and mouths insane words. He touches Cathy's hands and whispers that it is only the flesh that has died. He says that her soul will return, and that when it does, Cathy will live again.

But Doctor Cooper has left nothing undone. Every test known to medical science has been made. Cathy is dead.



WEDNESDAY: Paul and I were at the mausoleum today. Paul has decided that Cathy must rest in the bronze casket which he had prepared for himself. He wanted to test the bell. He is determined to remain in his room after the funeral services so that he will hear the signal if Cathy should revive and need him. My blood curdled as I watched him climb into the coffin.



THURSDAY: We buried Cathy today. We placed her in the casket and stood by it as the services were read. And I wept for what might have been. Part of my being lies there in the darkness with Cathy, interred forever with her in a shell of bronze.



LATER: It is Paul I must think of now. It is past midnight, but still he paces his room. His footsteps thud emptily beyond the wall. He must rest. He must.



FRIDAY: Paul did not sleep last night. He was seated in a big chair when I entered his room this morning, his red-rimmed, deep-sunken eyes fixed upon the bell which hangs by his bed. He did not turn when I spoke. Only his whisper reached me, dry, as the rustle of dead leaves.

"Rest? Fool! You can speak of rest when Cathy lies alone in a coffin? I must wait. If the bell rings, there will still be time to save her!"



MONDAY: I have not written for two days. What is there to write? Paul still has not slept. How he endures, I do not know. But he must rest . . . or die. It is late now, and still I hear him pacing beyond the wall. If only he would stop. If only he would take a little of the warm milk I had the manservant bring to him.



TUESDAY: It cannot be! Something has happened! Something so horrible, I cannot find the words . . .

This morning I went to Paul again. And I found him asleep, the empty milk glass beside him.

But as I entered, he stirred. He gazed at me with an expression I cannot describe. And he spoke one word: "Cathy!"



Paul had been dreaming. He told me, there in the grey morning light, in that musty room, that he had dreamed Cathy still lived. In his dream, he'd heard the bell. It had jangled insistently. But he'd not been able to move. He'd lain there, as if paralyzed. Until the jangle had ceased.

I could not stop him as he ran from the room. He shouted wildly about it *not* being a dream! He was going to Cathy! To the mausoleum!



I can feel it yet. The morning mist, wet upon my face as I followed him. The whipping branches that tore at my eyes. The grey mass of the vault, looming ahead, with the mist curling around it like possessive phantom fingers.

It was like a dream. My dream, this time. A nightmare come true. I saw Paul put his weight to the great door, saw it swing open, heard the creak of the hinges.



I paused at the door, waiting. I could not enter the place of death. I could not bear to see the grief which would etch the lines deeper into Paul's face when he learned that his mad race was in vain.

And then I heard Paul's voice. I heard it start as a choking cry and modulate into a shriek . . . the animal shriek that sometimes tears itself from the very bowels of a man. The shuddering scream of despair that chills the blood in the veins and freezes the marrow in the bones.

He was on the floor when I dashed in. He had struck his head in falling. There was blood and he lay quite still.

But it was not upon Paul that my eyes rivetted themselves. It was the open coffin.

I walked, like a sleepwalker to the side of the casket. And I saw.

Dear Heaven. I saw!



Paul had pulled out the bolts which secured the lid. That had been part of his plan. To leave the bolts hanging loosely in their sockets so that when the time came, they would slide easily out. They lay now, on the stone floor beside him. And the lid of the coffin had been swung open.

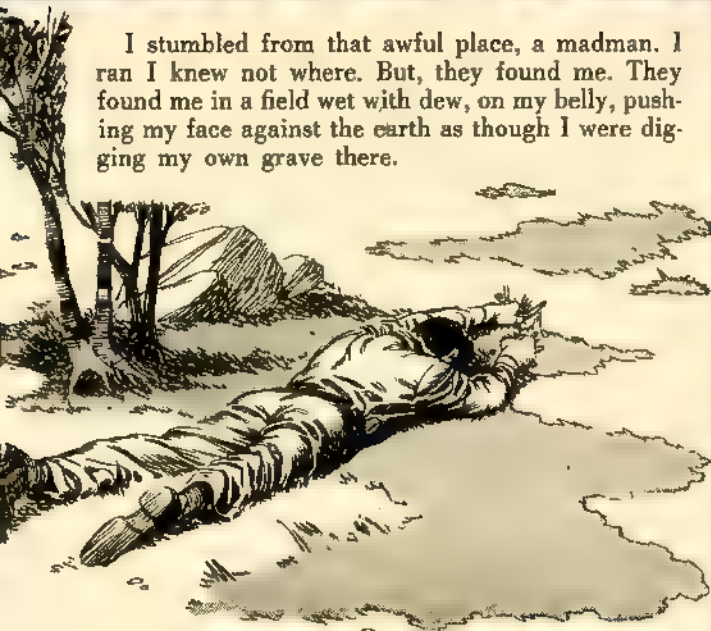
Cathy lay upon her side within, and the golden cascade of her hair had come undone, half obscuring her scratched and tortured face.

The shroud which had girdled her was torn and rent as if, in her agony, she had clawed at it with her fingers.

And the satin lining of the casket was shredded and bloody from her pounding and screaming and scratching.



I stumbled from that awful place, a madman. I ran I knew not where. But, they found me. They found me in a field wet with dew, on my belly, pushing my face against the earth as though I were digging my own grave there.



I was ill. Burning with fever. But I did not die. My madness lasted until now. It is night. Eleven hours have passed since I went to the tomb with Paul.

Only eleven hours. And ahead of me stretches a whole lifetime. I can write no more. Not now . . .



WEDNESDAY: The fever is gone. I am calmer now. But how much better it would have been if I had died.

Paul is dead, as Cathy is dead. He died there in the gloom beside her torn body from the blow on the head he suffered when he fell. The doctor told me.

I must set it all down. While I can. Who knows how long my sanity will endure?

Cathy was placed, living, in the tomb. Cathy, my poor darling! She was locked, living, in the bronze casket . . . and then she awakened!

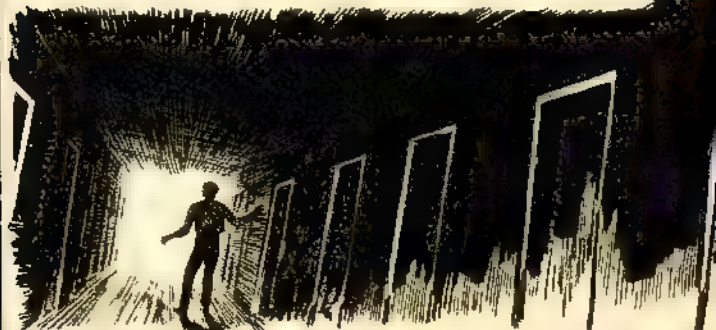
Oh, God, how she must have struggled! How she must have fought! Tearing at the chain within the casket until her fingers were torn and bleeding!



And all in vain. All for nothing. Because Paul slept! Soundly! Deeply! Completely! Not hearing the tolling of the bell except in his troubled dreams.



It is that which I keep remembering! I keep seeing that awful picture of Paul sleeping! And then I keep seeing another picture! I keep seeing a picture of a man walking down a long corridor!



A man . . . stealing down a long, dark corridor of a gloomy, old, many-gabled house to an old fashioned kitchen . . . and pouring a glass of milk . . . and taking something from his pocket . . .



But I must not think of it! As I must not think of Cathy! I must forget! And yet, how can I help my thoughts? How can I forget Cathy? How can I forget Paul?

I do not grieve for Paul. Paul is at rest now. The horror he saw in that tomb that morning means nothing to Paul now.

But I? How will I forget? Dear Lord, How? How will I ease my soul?

How can I forget the *sleeping pills* I dropped into the warm milk I made for Paul that night?

How can I forget that it was *I* who chained Paul to his bed, while outside, in the cold damp darkness of the mausoleum, in her bronze coffin, Cathy struggled and struggled and struggled until she died.

THE END

THE BASKET

The man was whistling softly as he trudged along.

Somewhere in the pines, a jay-bird screamed. A toad, invisible against the dust-dry background of the rutted road, leaped from under his hobnailed shoe in the nick of time. It startled him.

He stopped for a moment to study it. The toad waited, frozen, like a stone. He nudged it with his toe. The toad shot into the hot summer air. Once. Twice. It was lost in the high grass at the edge of the road.

The man moved on, still whistling

The jay-bird screamed again, closer this time. A flash of blue streaked from the pines ahead and disappeared into the oaks on the other side of the road.

He hesitated. Something had scared that jay-bird. His knuckles paled as he grasped the basket perched on his right shoulder. He stopped whistling.

The boy came out of the pine grove. He pushed through the grass to the road. His head was down so he did not see

When he looked up, his eyes widened, and his face paled. He froze there, like the toad, staring at the man with the basket.



Then the boy turned and ran. Not in fear. In a kind of throbbing excitement. He sprinted down the road, his bare toes catching up dust and throwing it back behind him in little yellow clouds.

"He's coming! He's coming again!" he cried as he neared a small group of boys huddled over an engrossing game of marbles. "Mr. Cabez is coming into town again."



"Did you see him?" A freckled-faced boy got to his feet.

"He's up the road. Nearly scared me to death," the messenger gasped, breathlessly pointing in the direction from which he'd come.

"Has he got his basket with him?" Another boy stood up.

The boy on the ground took careful aim. "Did you ever see him *without* it?"



Four wide-eyed expectant faces turned in the direction of the distant sound of whistling. They waited, with only the rasps of their excited breathing. Their game was forgotten.

He rounded the bend in the road and came into sight. The man.

"See? What did I tell you? He never goes anywhere without that basket!"



They whispered among themselves as the strange figure with the round wicker basket perched on his shoulder approached.

"Always carries it on his right shoulder, too!"

"He's crazy, that's what he is!"

"Sh-h-h! He'll hear you!"

The man stopped whistling and smiled as he came up to where the group of boys stood waiting.



"Hello, kids!" His voice was soft, with a trace of a sigh.

"Hello, Mr. Cabez!"

"Whatcha got in your basket this time, huh, Mr. Cabez?"

"Yeah, Mr. Cabez. Tell us!"

It was an old game the boys played every time Mr. Cabez came into town.



"This time, kids," Mr. Cabez grinned down at the shining upturned faces around him and gripped the handle of the basket a little tighter, "this time my basket is filled with... with gold! Pirate gold! Pieces of eight! And Spanish doubloons! Part of a treasure I found buried in my cellar!"

"Really?" gasped the freckled-face boy.

"Golly!"

"Gee!"



It was a game they played, yet the boys played it to the hilt, sounding as though they really believed. Mr. Cabez smiled, patted a shock of red hair, and continued on down the road to town, his whistling echoing back across the heavy summer air.

"Boy, he tells some tall tales!" said the freckled face one.

"Tetched in the haid, I say!" The red-head tapped his temple knowingly. "I never see him without that basket!"



The squealing screen door of the town General Store shrieked a warning as the man with the basket pulled it open. The laughter and the small talk of the men gathered around the cold pot-bellied stove died suddenly. There was a moment of awkward silence.

"Afternoon, Vincent!" The proprietor rose from his rocker. "Come in to order your vittles?"

"That's right, George! Got my list right here!" Mr. Cabez handed him a crumpled piece of paper.



"I'll drop this order by your place early this evenin', Vincent. I'll be passin' that way!" George studied the scrawled list.

Vincent Cabez nodded and turned to go. He looked over toward the silent men seated about the stove.

"Afternoon, Gentlemen!" he smiled.

Old Clem stared at him. Zeb nodded coldly. Cal was the only one who spoke.

"Howdy, Cabez!" The minute he said it, he looked as if he were sorry.



Vincent stood there for a moment, waiting . . . then shrugged and left. The slam of the screen door was the signal for the talk among the men to begin again.

"Tried to strike up a conversation, he did!" said Cal, reassuring the others of his feelings.

"Yuh don't catch me talkin' to no lunatic," Zeb growled.

"Crazy galoot," said Clem, shaking his head. "Always totin' that basket!"



"I wonder *why* he carries that basket around with him?" Cal scratched his two day growth of beard.

"He's crazy! That's why!" snapped Zeb. "Ain't I right, George? That Vincent Cabez is crazy?"

"You sure are, Zeb!" George leaned over the counter and waved the crumpled sheet of paper Cabez had given him. "See this? It's his vittles order! Comes in here once a week and leaves it. I deliver it to his place."



"You know what I see every time I go there with his order? He answers the door carryin' that basket! Kin you imagine that? Carryin' that basket on his shoulder around his house, even?" George shook his head.

"He sure is loco," said Clem.



A week passed.

A heavy rain came over the hills and soaked the parched fields and the corn grew a whole foot in height.

And then, it was time for another trip to town for the man with the basket.

He came down the familiar road, plodding slowly, his feet dragging, as if the weight he was carrying was too much for one man to bear.



The kids were waiting at the bend near town as usual. But they heard no familiar whistling. The figure they saw approaching was not the familiar spry figure they had grown so accustomed to.

"Hey, look at Mr. Cabez," said the freckled-faced one. "He looks awful!"

"He's as white as a ghost! He must be sick!" The red-head seemed actually concerned.

"Must be gettin' tired of carryin' his basket!"

"Gee! Do you think we should kid him today?"



The small group of boys studied the man with the basket as he came near. There were dark shadows under his eyes and his face was drawn and pale. The lines around his mouth seemed deeper, somehow.

But, in spite of his fatigued appearance, Mr. Cabez stopped as usual and smiled down at the children around him.

"Hello, boys," he said. His voice was tired.

"Hi, Mr. Cabez."

"Lo, Mr. Cabez."

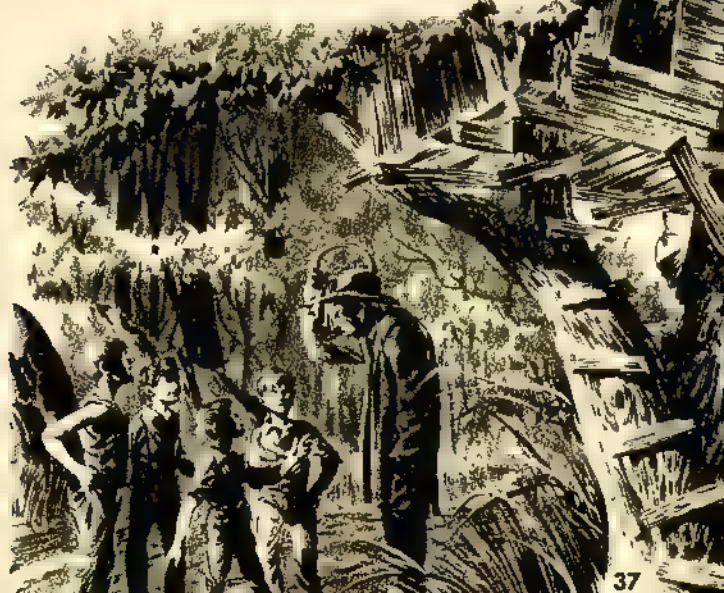


There was a moment of silence. Mr. Cabez forced a weak laugh.

"What's the matter with you kids today?" he asked. "Cat got your tongues? Isn't anybody goin' to ask me what I've got in my basket this time?"

"Gee, Mr. Cabez," blurted the freckled-faced one, "You don't look so good!"

"Ain't you feelin' well, Mr. Cabez?" The red-head moved toward him instinctively, then backed off. "Are you sick?"



Mr. Cabez was silent for a moment, then mumbled something about being all right, and moved off down the road toward the General Store.

The kids looked at each other.

"Gee, he got such a funny look when I asked him if he was feelin' well," said the red-head.

"He *must* be sick!" said the freckled-faced one.

"Gee, maybe he's gonna die!"



An eager look came over the red-head's face. "If he *does* die, maybe we'll all find out what he's really got in that basket!"

"Aw, cut it out! That ain't funny!" said the one with the freckles.

"Yeah! The poor guy! He can't help it if he's got a phobia or somethin'! Maybe he don't trust anybody and he carries his money *with* him 'stead of puttin' it in the bank like other folks!"



The usual silence greeted Vincent Cabez as he entered the General Store. He looked around at the cold faces gathered at the stove and plodded to the counter.

"Here's my list, George!" He said it as if it were the last time.

"Say! You sick, Cabez?" George studied him. "You look pretty bad!"

"I feel pretty bad," said Cabez. "I was plannin' on stoppin' by at Doc Hawkins'."

"You'd better," said George.



When he had finished his business at the General Store, Vincent Cabez crossed the town street and turned in at the little white cottage with the neatly painted sign: Edward Hawkins, M.D.

He plodded up the front walk, the basket on his shoulder, pushed the bell and waited.

Old Doc Hawkins swung open the door, stared at Vincent's tired drawn face and shot a quick glance at the basket.

"I've got to see you," said Vincent.

"Come in, Vincent. Come in." The Doctor smiled.



Another week went by.

There was no rain and the corn withered. The fields dried and coughed dust to the summer winds. It was time again for another trip to town.

The boys waited at the bend in the road.

"Hey! Look! Here comes Mr. Cabez!"

"He . . . he looks different," said the freckled one.

"He ain't pale no more," said the red-head.

"Gee! He's all better! He ain't gonna die after all!"



The look of fatigue was gone. The plodding step was gone. The dark patches under his eyes were gone. Instead, Mr. Cabez's eyes flamed.

The boys gathered around him as he approached . . . smiling . . . chattering . . . pulling at his clothes.

"Hi, Mr. Cabez!"

"What's in the basket today, Mr. Cabez?"

"Yeah. Tell us, Mr. Cabez!"

"Out of my way . . . Brats!"



Mr. Cabez snarled. He swung viciously, slapping the red-head across the mouth.

The other boys just stared, too stunned to move.



Mr. Cabez cursed the child lying on the ground and strode off down the road.

"He . . . he hit me!" The red-head got to his feet and began to cry.

"Did you see his eyes? Did you see the look in his eyes?"

"I'm gonna tell my ol' man about this, that's what I'm gonna do!"

"I *knew* he looked different," said the freckled-faced one. He studied the figure moving down the road in a cloud of dust. "He's carrying his basket on his *left* shoulder!"



In the General Store, Cabez flung his vittles list to the counter and turned to face the silent men around the stove. His eyes blazed and his mouth twisted into an angry scowl.

"What's wrong? Am I poison or something? Why doesn't someone say something? What are you all so quiet about?" he shouted at them suddenly.



"You all hate me, don't you? You think I'm crazy, don't you? Just because I go around carryin' this basket! Well, I'm good as any one o' you! Twice as good! You'll be sorry 'bout the way you treat me! Each an' every one o' you! You'll be sorry! You'll see! I'll show you!"

"You'd better get out of here, Cabez, before you start trouble," said George quietly.



They found Zeb Miller's body the next morning. He'd not come home from the Grange meeting the previous night and his wife had gone into town, looking for him. She'd found his body in the road, the dry dust soaking up his blood. And she'd seen the look of horror frozen on his white face.



The men sat around the pot-bellied stove and whispered.

"It was Cabez! I'll bet my bottom dollar," said Clem. "He seemed worse than he's ever been yesterday. Ain't I right, George?"

"You're right, Clem," said George. "But you can't go around accusin' a man of murder without proof!"



That night, they got their proof.

Clem's wife heard his hoarse cry echo across the barnyard. By the time she got to him, he was on the floor of the barn, his eyes bulging, staring past her at some indescribable horror he'd seen. His blood pooled out on the barn floor from the grinning slit in his throat. He whispered just one bubbling word before he died.

"Cabez..."



The lights in town blazed. Burning torches danced in the street. The word had spread like wildfire.

They came with their pitchforks and scythes and rifles. With axes and rope and lengths of lead pipe. They poured into town with curses on their lips and the taste of blood on their dry tongues.



"All right," screamed Cal Farnsworth. "Let's go get the dirty murderin' b..." His words were drowned out by the frenzied cheer of the angry mob. "Let's go! Let's lynch 'im!"

They moved off, up the main street, shouting and spitting and brandishing their weapons, feeling the pulsating beat of the murder in their hearts.



Old Doc Hawkins burst into the sheriff's office. The man with the star looked up from his paper.

"Aren't you going to try to stop them?" the Doc screamed. The sheriff shrugged. "They're going up to lynch Vincent Cabez! It's your duty to stop..."

"I'm only one man, Doc," the sheriff snapped. "What can one man do against a mob?"

"But you can't let them lynch him! They'd be killing an innocent man!" The Doc's voice shook with emotion.



The sheriff stood up and crossed to the window to watch the last of the flickering torches disappear out of town.

"Ol' Clem's dyin' words accused Cabez! That sure don't make him anythin' but guilty to me," he said.



"But there are *two* Vincent Cabezes!" said the Doc. "And one of them is innocent!"

"Two Vincent Cabezes!" The sheriff turned and stared at the old Doctor. "What in blazes are you talking about?"



"Vincent Cabez," said Doc Hawkins quietly, "was born with *two* heads!



It was silent in the sheriff's office.

The din of the lynch mob had faded around the bend in the road leading from town, and the only sound was the heavy breathing of the two men facing each other in the silence.

"Two heads..." the sheriff hissed.

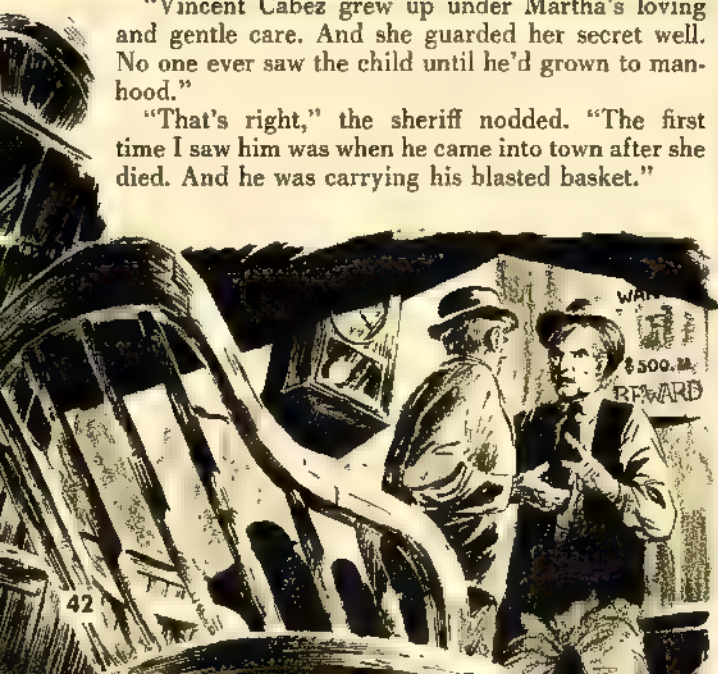
"That's right," said the Doc. "I delivered him myself. His folks have long since moved away so I needn't tell you who they were.

"When I told his mother, she refused to accept him. She became hysterical when she saw the baby and screamed that I should do away with him.

"Then, Martha Cabez, the mid-wife that helped me deliver him, volunteered to take him. She was childless herself, and lonely. She begged me not to kill him but to let her have him for as long as he might live. I consented, after first warning her that she would have to guard her secret."

"Vincent Cabez grew up under Martha's loving and gentle care. And she guarded her secret well. No one ever saw the child until he'd grown to manhood."

"That's right," the sheriff nodded. "The first time I saw him was when he came into town after she died. And he was carrying his blasted basket."



"That was my idea," smiled the Doc. "After his mother's death, Vincent was on his own. A plan had to be devised whereby he could move about the town streets without causing panic. The basket idea was the only solution."



"Vincent had always been able to completely control his other head," the Doc went on. "He was a good man . . . Vincent. But, his other head . . . well, there was something evil about it.

"They say a man has both good and evil in him, and the good is constantly fighting the evil. That's the way it was with Vincent. It was as though all of the evil in him was concentrated in the brain of his right head. And he constantly had to fight it. I always considered Vincent, the real Vincent, as being the left head."

"And that's why the basket always covered the right head," said the sheriff.

"Exactly," nodded the Doc. "Until recently! Two weeks ago, Vincent stopped by to see me. His face was drawn and tired, his eyes bloodshot with dark circles below them. It was obvious what was happening. The right head was trying to take over his body! He hadn't slept in four nights!"

"There was nothing I could do, except urge Vincent to fight it. And you know what happened. His other head won out. When he came into town this last time, his other head was in control. His evil head!"



"That explains his ornery behavior," mused the sheriff, "his hittin' Luke Fenwick's kid . . . and then the murders."

"Vincent's other head is the real criminal," the Doc cried. "The other head is the evil-doer!"

"And you can't kill it without killing Vincent!" old Doc Hawkins concluded.

"What'll we do?" the sheriff shook his head. "That lynch crowd must be there by now! We can't possibly save him!"



They broke into a run the last few hundred yards. They shouted and cursed and kicked up the dry dust of the road. And in the torchlight, they looked like phantom figures . . . banshees, shrieking.

They poured over the barnyard, their very inertia knocking down rail-fences in their path. They waved their ropes and sticks and lengths of pipe, and jabbed the air with their pitchforks, and knifed it with their scythes. And they cried for blood. For the blood of Vincent Cabez.

And then their shouts and curses and cries faded away, echoing into the surrounding hills. A chilled silence fell over the crowd. A whimper shuddered through it. A gasp. A low moan. Then, a cry of horror.

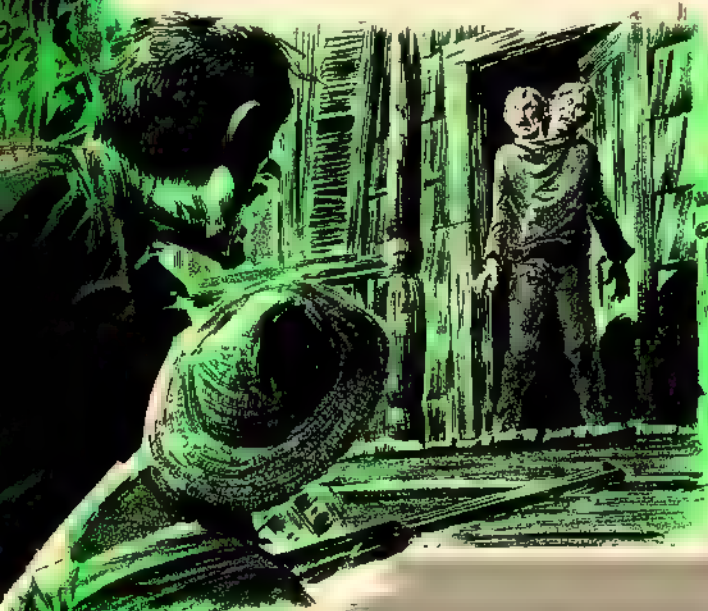


Vincent Cabez stood in the doorway.
"Good Lord! He's got two heads!" somebody cried

"The basket! That's why he carried the basket!"
Nobody moved.

Vincent Cabez's right head glared. "What do you want? What are you all doing here?"

And Vincent Cabez's left head looked pleadingly at the gathered men. "Kill us! Please! For God's sake, kill us! I can't fight him any longer!"



The figure in the doorway seemed to shudder.
Then it pitched forward, charging the horror-struck mob.

"If none of you will kill us," said the left head determinedly, "I will!"

"No! No! Stop, you idiot! Stop!" The right head shrieked in fear

Vincent Cabez snatched a rifle from a cringing man in the front of the crowd.



The lynching party stood frozen, each man rooted to the ground by the horror before their eyes.

"Kill us! Please!" The left head screamed.

"Shut up! You fool! Shut up!" There was fear in the eyes of the right head now.

"He's evil! He's evil and I can't fight him any more! Kill him! Kill me! Kill us both!" The left head looked at the men and saw that no one moved.



Two shots rang out.

The staccatto reports echoed and re-echoed into the night, like phantom applause.

The two-headed body of Vincent Cabez sprawled in the mud of the barnyard. Dead.

The crowd moved off, sick . . . ashamed . . .

The old Doc stood beside the body. The sheriff shrugged. "We were too late!"

"Is this the way it'll be?" whispered the Doc to nobody in particular. "Will it always be too late? Will good have to destroy itself . . . to destroy evil."



THE END

The

Gorilla's Paw



Floyd stood outside the curio shop window, gazing in at the weird assortment of objects that crowded every available inch of display space.

There was a dust-covered bust of Mozart, a chipped-gold statue of Buddah, a rusted helmet, a carved ivory pipe . . .

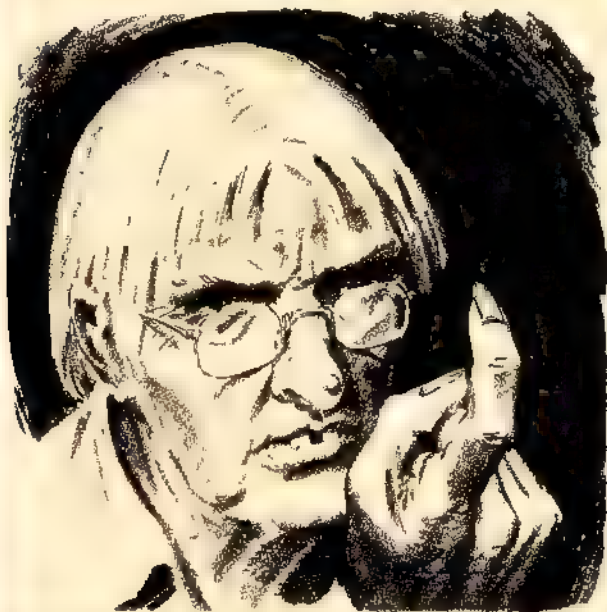
Floyd shook his head. He wondered idly what kind of people would spend good money on such useless junk.

Then, slowly, as his glance moved from one article to the next, Floyd began to feel uneasy. It wasn't the curios that were frightening. It was something else. Something about this dirty old store-window with its ancient relics that made a chill run up his spine. He looked up suddenly and caught his breath.

Behind the window display stood the shop-keeper, staring at him with small, wrinkled, beady eyes.

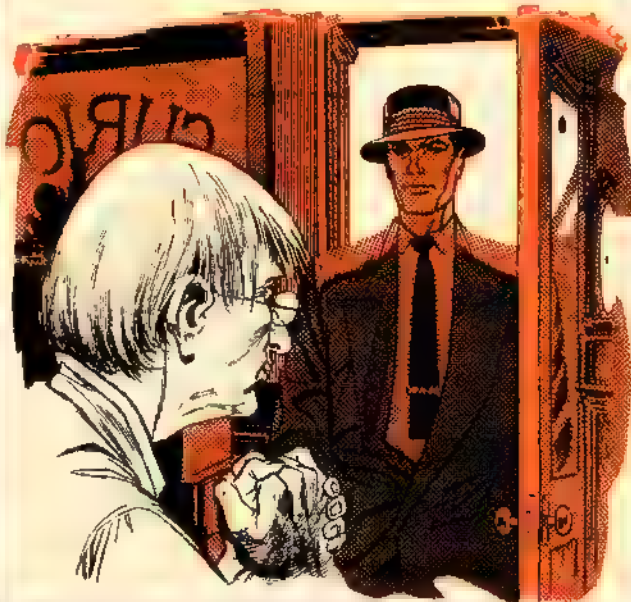
"What's the old buzzard gawking at me for?" Floyd said to himself. "Do I look like I'd be crazy enough to buy some of his junk?"

The old man crooked a gnarled finger at Floyd and motioned for him to enter the curio shop.



At first, Floyd was tempted to turn away and ignore the invitation, but the look on the old man's face was one of grim concern. So, Floyd shrugged and entered the shop. As he opened the door, a bell tinkled somewhere in the rear.

"Come in, young man," the shopkeeper said, gleefully. "Come in!"



The foul odor of staleness and musty decay seared Floyd's nostrils. He looked about the dark, dusty interior of the curio shop.

"Listen, mister," he said, brusquely. "I'm not in the market for any of this . . . stuff. You got the wrong boy . . ."

"But I have something I think you'll want," said the shopkeeper cryptically.



The old man scurried behind the counter and opened a drawer. From it, he lifted a small wooden case and placed it carefully upon the dusty counter-top.

Floyd turned to go. "Not me, old timer! I can think of lots better ways to spend my dough . . ."

"Wait!" The old man almost screamed it. "Just look at it, that's all I ask! Just look at it!"



Floyd hesitated, then shrugged. "Okay, I'll look at it," he snapped. "But make it quick!"

The gnarled old shopkeeper took a small rusted key from his pocket and inserted it into the lock set in the lid of the small oak chest.

The lid opened, squealing as if in warning. "Good Lord!" Floyd choked out the words.



He stepped back in dismay as the fetid odor of decay swept up from the open box as if happy to be free. The old curio dealer reached in and lifted the hideous thing from the moth-eaten velvet lining.

"What . . . What is it?" Floyd gagged.

"It's a mummified gorilla's paw, my friend," the shopkeeper's voice was eager now. "A rare specimen! A collector's item! I'll sell it cheap . . ."



Floyd shuddered as he studied the wrinkled, black-skinned, hairy paw. There was a strange feeling in the pit of his stomach. A chill went up his spine. He laughed out loud, as if to chase the sudden fear that gripped him.

"Hah! And what in blue blazes would I want with a disgusting-looking, mummified gorilla's paw?"

"That would be up to you," the shopkeeper said.



"If you want to buy it," the old man added, "It's twenty-five dollars. Without the chest, that is! The chest is extra!"

Floyd shook his head and started for the door. "Twenty-five bucks . . . for that monstrosity? Not me, Pops! Find yourself another sucker! I'm goin' . . ."

The old man held the paw and stared at Floyd. "I wish you'd buy it," he murmured.



Floyd stopped, his hand on the doorknob. The old man. He suddenly felt sorry for the old man. Or was it the paw? What was it that fascinated him about that ugly, dried-up paw? He turned back. He walked to the counter slowly. The old man smiled. "Let's see the filthy thing," he held out his hand.



The old man placed the hairy, dried extremity in Floyd's outstretched hand. Floyd stared down at it. There was no feeling of fear now. It was gone . . . replaced by a strange fascination for the gnarled, hairy thing he held.

"Twenty-five bucks, eh?"

"Then you'll take it?" The shopkeeper cried.

"I'll take it," said Floyd. "I . . . I kinda like it. There's something about it . . ."



Floyd reached into his pocket and withdrew the pay envelope he'd collected just that day. He counted out twenty-five dollars.

"The chest!" The old man had forgotten about it. "What about the chest? You'll want that, too! I'll let it go cheap! Only five dollars . . ."

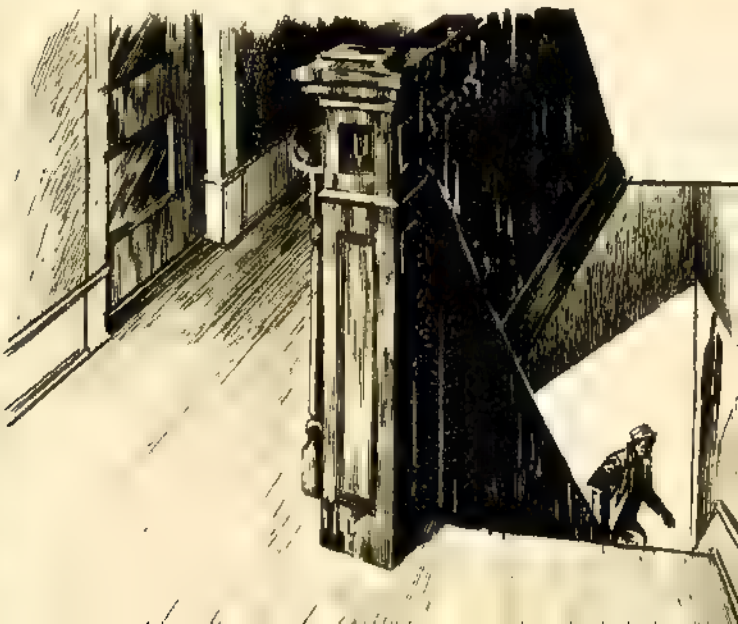
Floyd shook his head. He held up the paw. "This is all I want," he said, smiling.



He pocketed the mummified gorilla's paw and left the shop. He made his way down the street as if in a dream. He felt a weird kind of satisfaction, as though a great need had been satisfied.

Soon, Floyd arrived at the run-down tenement where he lived. The walk in the evening air had cleared his head. His perspective had returned.

"I must have been crazy," he said to himself as he climbed the rickety steps.



He flung open the door to his shabby flat and cursed. "I don't know what got into me!" He withdrew the dried-up paw from his pocket and examined it critically. "Twenty-five bucks for this . . . this piece of junk! I must have been crazy! Half my pay, shot!" He tossed the thing on the dresser, disgusted with himself.



He undressed slowly, musing to himself, half-aloud. "Why did I do it? I must have felt sorry for the old coot! A sucker, that's what I am! A sucker! I didn't want the thing! I didn't! But I listened to his sob story and I bought it! For twenty-five bucks! Now I wish I hadn't!"

He turned out the light and lay in the darkness, listening to the street noises below.



Floyd slept fitfully that night. He was angry, and his anger haunted his dreams. He saw the old man in pain, screaming, and he felt revenged.

He was awakened once during the night by a soft scratching sound. He opened his eyes, waiting. The sound was not repeated. "Probably a stray cat," he reasoned and turned over and went back to sleep.

In the morning, when he awoke, the first thing he saw was the gorilla's paw . . . and the money.



He leaped out of bed and stumbled to the dresser. The paw was there where he'd left it the night before. But under it was a sheaf of green bills.

He counted them. There was twenty-five dollars in ones and fives.

He counted them again to make sure.

He stared at the money, and then at the dried-up mummified limb.



"Of course," he laughed.

He checked his pay envelope. It was still in his pocket. And the balance of his pay was there too. He hadn't taken it out and placed it under the paw after all! A cold uneasiness crept over him.

"Cripes," he said to himself. "I didn't put the dough there! I wonder where it came from?"



He dressed slowly, not bothering to shave. It was Saturday, and there was no need.

He had a small breakfast in a local diner and made his way to his favorite off-day hangout. Nick's poolroom. Eddie and Joe were there when he arrived. He decided not to tell his friends about his latest purchase for fear of being ribbed.

And in the excitement of a hot game of snooker, he forgot about the twenty-five dollars.



"I'm hungry," Joe said after his shot.

"You're always hungry," said Floyd, chalking his cue.

"Let's eat!" Joe chose to ignore Floyd's remark.

"I'm not hungry," said Eddie.

"Neither am I," said Floyd. He missed his shot.

"Well, I am," smiled Joe, glancing out of the poolroom window. "And there's the answer to my prayers!" He nodded toward the umbrella-covered pushcart at the curb.



Joe racked his cue and headed for the door.

"I'm gonna get me a couple of hotdogs. You guys want one?" he called back.

"Not from *that* guy, Joe!" Floyd glanced out at the pushcart. "Those dogs he sells are made of junk! You'll get sick. Better not..."

But Joe was out of earshot, his mouth watering.



Floyd and Eddie waited patiently as Joe sated his appetite with four hotdogs of questionable quality, washed down by some equally questionable lemonade. Then they resumed their game.

An hour later, Joe was doubled up with pain.

"I don't feel so good," he moaned. "Those dogs didn't agree with my stomach!"



"Your stomach," Floyd sneered. "You see? You wouldn't listen to me! I told you they were junk!"

"I was hungry," Joe wailed.

"You're always hungry," snapped Floyd. "You're always stuffing that stomach of yours. I wish you didn't have a stomach. Then you wouldn't be hungry all the time and we could play!"

He sunk the eight ball in the corner pocket.



That night, when Floyd returned to his room, he had a feeling that something was wrong. Something was different. As he undressed, his glance fell upon the dresser.

"The gorilla paw," he gasped. "It's gone!" He looked around his room. There was no sign of the mummified limb. "Somebody swiped it," he concluded.



He climbed into bed, puzzled. "There sure are some crazy things happening to me lately," he mumbled. "First, I buy a piece of junk I don't want for twenty-five bucks. Then I get my dough back. And now, the blasted thing is stolen. Well, good riddance, I say!" He turned over and closed his eyes.

Floyd slept fitfully again that night. Again, he was troubled by nightmares. He kept seeing Joe, stuffing himself with hotdogs. Then, the scene would fade and he'd see Joe writhing on the floor, shrieking in pain.

In the morning, when he awoke, the gorilla paw was back on the dresser.



Floyd got out of bed and sleepily picked up the mummified limb. He studied it, turning it over and over. It was covered with muddy brown stains.



Suddenly, there was a frantic pounding on the door. "Open up, Floyd! It's me! Eddie! Quick!" The voice outside was as frantic as the pounding.

"Just a minute, Eddie," Floyd called, slipping the paw into the top drawer of the dresser.



Floyd opened the door. Eddie pushed by him, white as a sheet.

"What's up, Eddie? You look as though you've seen a ghost!"

"They found Joe in his room this morning, Floyd! He's dead! Joe's dead! It was awful! Awful..."



Floyd closed the door. He felt himself beginning to tremble. "What happened to him, Eddie? Tell me! What happened to Joe?" He almost knew the answer.

"I saw him before they took him away," whispered Eddie. "I saw him..."



"It was like he'd been attacked by some wild animal," Eddie went on. "His belly was ripped open ... and his guts ... were ..."

He coughed and hurried into the bathroom. Floyd turned to the dresser, shaking.



He slid open the top drawer and stared down at the stained paw lying on his shirts. A wave of horror swept over him. "Eddie," he whispered. "Eddie, you remember yesterday ... when I wished Joe didn't ... didn't have a stomach ... so he wouldn't be hungry all the time ... ?"



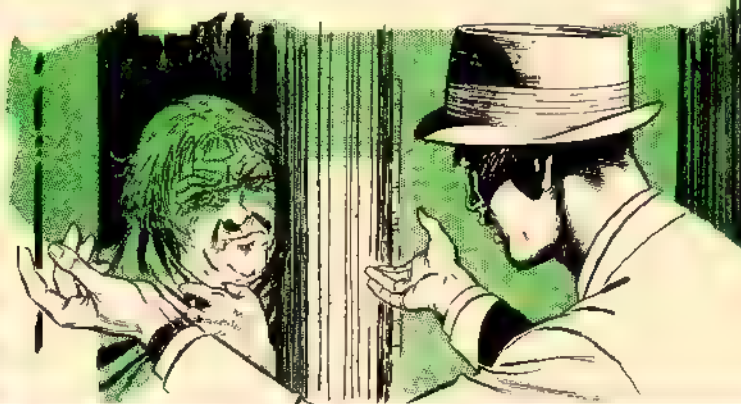
That night, Floyd put the mummified gorilla paw in his pocket and went up-town to the curio shop. When he got there, it was dark. "Sunday," he cursed. "I forgot!" He pounded on the shaded door.



Finally, a light blinked on inside. Muffled footsteps approached. The door swung open. An old woman's face peered out. "Go away," she sighed. "No more questions!"

"I've got to see the old man who owns this store," said Floyd. "Where is he? I've got to see him!"

The old woman looked at Floyd. "My husband is dead!"



"Dead!" Floyd gasped, an icy hand seizing him. "Murdered! Choked to death!" The woman said it as though this were the millionth time. "Friday night. Some petty thief. For a lousy twenty-five dollars. I was in the back . . . asleep . . ."



Floyd stumbled from the shop, trembling, sick. He moved up the deserted night street, mumbling to himself, "Those stains . . . on the gorilla's paw. They were blood. Joe's blood. I *know* now! The paw is . . ."

"Don't move, Buddy," a voice behind him hissed.



Floyd spun around. The man stood in the shadows, brandishing a gun. "This is a stick-up," he snarled.

"I've got a couple of bucks on me. You're welcome to that," said Floyd, raising his hands.

"Fork it over," snapped the gunman. "And that watch you're wearing, too! And no tricks!"



Reluctantly, Floyd pulled out his money and removed his watch. The hold-up man snatched them and fled down a dimly-lit alley. Floyd cursed.

"Blasted rotten luck! I don't mind the dough, but I wish he hadn't stolen my . . . watch . . ."

His voiced died as he realized what he'd said.



Instinctively, he reached for the gorilla paw in his pocket. It was gone.

"No," he whispered. "No! It's not true! It can't be true! Things like this just don't happen! Not in real life!"

By the time Floyd reached his dismal flat, he was bathed in perspiration. He looked around his room the moment he opened the door. The paw wasn't there.

He undressed nervously and crept into bed. But he couldn't sleep. He kept thinking about Joe, with his guts torn out. And then he thought about the old man of the curio shop . . . murdered . . . for twenty-five dollars.

Towards morning, he dozed. But he awoke with a start, escaping from a nightmare of a hold-up man's terrorized face.

He got out of bed, and flicked on a light. Then he caught his breath. The paw was back . . . on the dresser. And his stolen watch lay beside it, covered with blood.



"It's true!" Floyd cried. "It's true! I didn't want to believe it, but now I have to! The gorilla paw is alive! It answers my wishes!" He stared down at the bloody watch. "Last night, I wished my watch wasn't stolen. And now it's back!"



"That first night, I wished I hadn't bought it! So it returned the twenty-five bucks I spent on it! It went and got it! It killed the old man! Then I wished poor Joe didn't have a stomach . . . and . . . choke . . . I've got to test it! I've got to see!"



He turned to the paw, shuddering. "I wish . . ." He looked around the room. "I wish that radio was turned on, that's what I wish!"

The paw twitched. The stiffness ran out of it like thawing meat. A finger moved. Then another.



Then it began to move. Slowly . . . painfully . . . dragging itself by its wrinkled fingers, across the dresser top, down the side, to the floor. And as it pulled itself along, it made a strange kind of scratching sound, like the sound Floyd had heard that first night.



The paw moved slowly across the floor to the table on which the radio sat. Floyd stared at the hideous crawling thing in horrified fascination. Finally, he could stand it no longer.

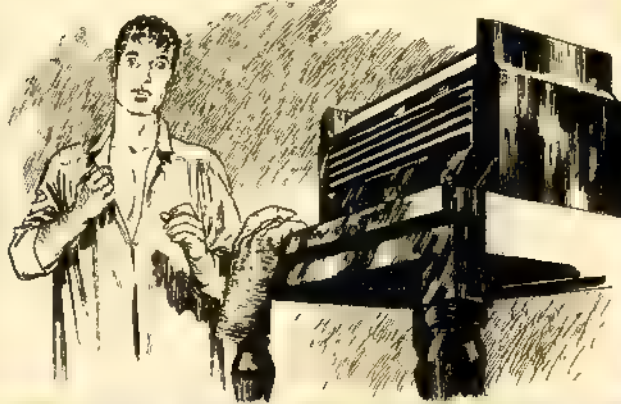
"Stop," he shrieked. "I wish you to stop!"



The gorilla paw moved to the table leg, began to climb, awkwardly. Finally, it reached the table-top.

"Stop, I said! I wish you to stop!"

The paw ignored Floyd's screaming. It had a mission to complete and could not be bothered.

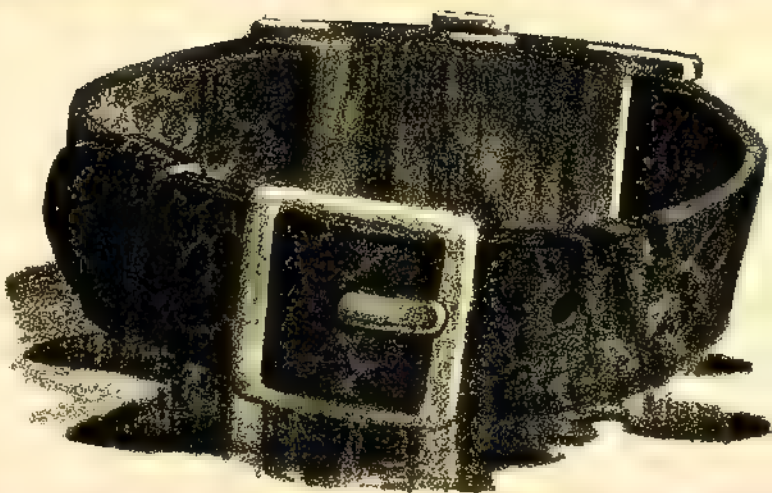


Floyd turned away. "It won't listen to me," he whispered half-aloud. "I wished, and it won't listen to me! It's doing what I first wished! It won't stop! It's got to carry out each wish to the finish before it takes on another!"

There was a click. The radio came on. The hand stiffened. The voice of a newscaster blared.

"A small time hold-up man was found in an alley at dawn today. His hand had been savagely ripped off at the wrist. The severed limb was found some yards away from the body. A preliminary coroner's report states, however, that the hoodlum's death was caused by fright, and not loss of blood. Police have been alerted to be on the lookout for..."

Floyd stepped to the radio and snapped it off. Then he looked at his watch lying on the dresser. The watchband was still buckled closed!



He slipped on a robe, grabbed some change, and rushed downstairs to the pay-phone in the hall. He had to call Eddie! He had to tell him! Eddie would know what to do!

A sleepy voice answered finally.

"Eddie? It's Floyd. I'm sorry I woke you up! I'm in trouble! Listen, and listen carefully!" Floyd's voice shook as he told Eddie the whole story.

"... and the paw does whatever I wish!" he concluded. "Eddie, what should I do? Should I tell the cops? What?"

"Don't be an idiot, Floyd!" Eddie sounded wide-awake and eager now. "Why should you tell the cops? If it's true, you're set! You could wish for dough! Big dough! Ten grand, maybe! A million!"

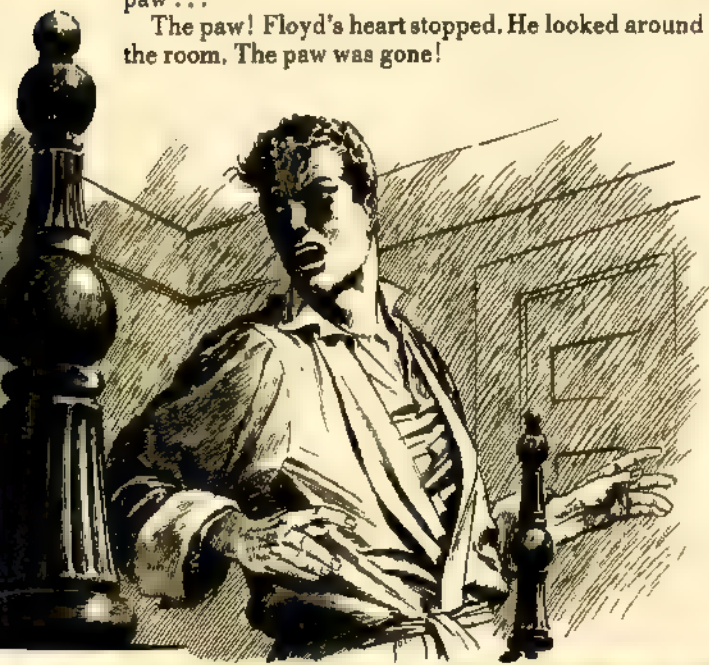
"You'd be crazy to go to the cops, Floyd," Eddie cried. "You can be rich! Rich!"

"Gee, Eddie," said Floyd. "You're right! I never thought of that! What a dope I am! I wish I had your brains!"



Floyd hung up and went back upstairs, whistling softly. He stepped into his dingy flat. That would be the first thing he'd do! Move! Get a plush place uptown! All he'd have to do was wish, and the paw...

The paw! Floyd's heart stopped. He looked around the room. The paw was gone!



Floyd stood by the window, looking out at the dawn city. He knew it was no use. A million times he'd wished, but he knew the paw wouldn't heed. It was on a mission. A mission it would complete.

And then, after a long while, Floyd heard the scratching at the door. He flung it open, knowing what he'd see. The paw dragged itself in, pulling the bloody sack after it.



Floyd knelt and peered into the sack. A violent nausea swept over him. He turned away from the pale, convoluted, bloodied mess inside.

"Brains," he whispered. "Eddie's brains!"



Suddenly, Floyd screamed. He hadn't realized the entire meaning of his wish! Not until now! Not until he felt the gorilla paw spring to his back and work its way up his neck. Then he screamed.



And the last thing Floyd remembered, before everything went black, was the excruciating pain in his head... as though the top of his skull was being ripped away.

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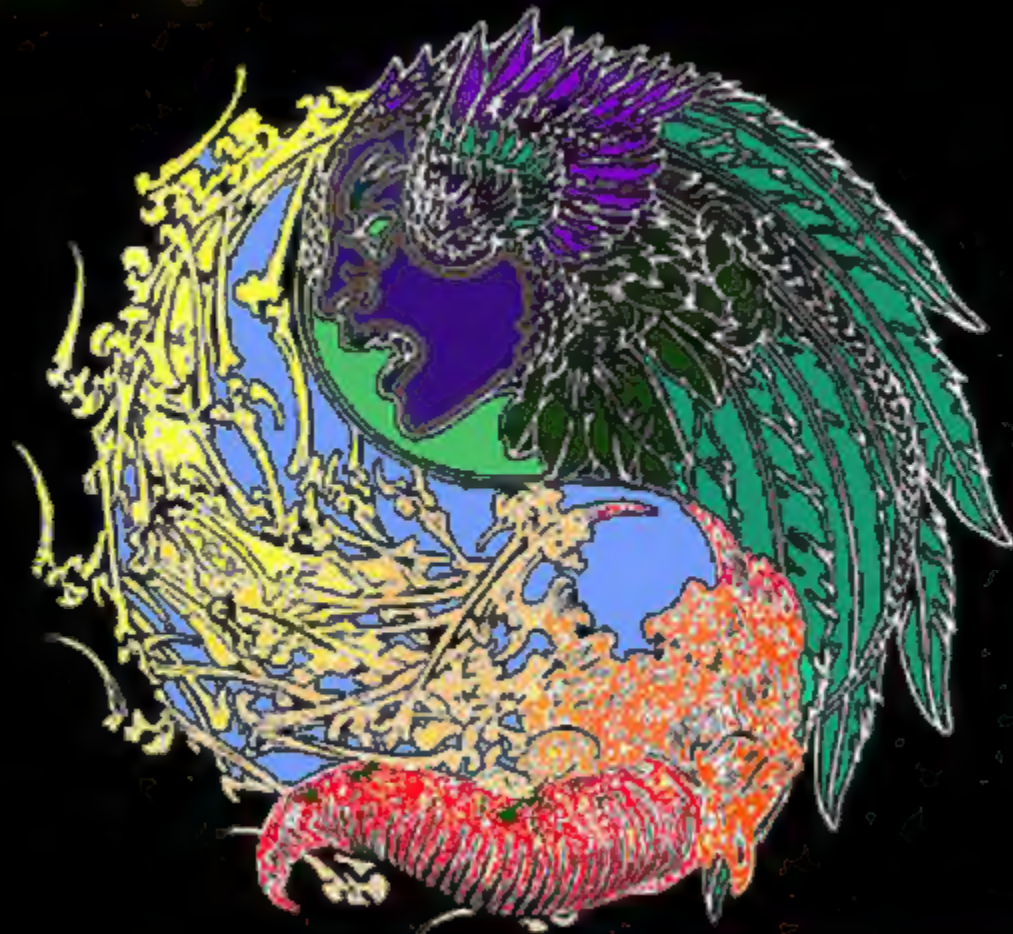
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